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# PRABUDDHA BHARATA

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Started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896

MAY 2002



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# PRABUDDHA BHARATA

**MAY 2002**

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Cover: Swami Vivekananda's Temple at Ramakrishna Math, Belur



# PRABUDDHA BHARATA

ARISE! AWAKE! AND STOP NOT TILL THE GOAL IS REACHED

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## Traditional Wisdom

THE DIVINITY WITHIN

यश्चक्षुषा न पश्यति येन चक्षुषि पश्यति ।  
तदेव ब्रह्म त्वं विद्धि नेदं यदिदमुपासते ॥

That which cannot be perceived by the eye, but by which the eye is perceived—know That alone as Brahman, and not that which people here worship. (*Kena Upaniṣad*, 1.7)

न जायते म्रियते वा कदाचिन्नायं भूत्वा भविता वा न भूयः ।  
अजो नित्यः शाश्वतोऽयं पुराणो न हन्यते हन्यमाने शरीरे ॥

It is never born, nor does It ever die. Nor, having once been, will It again cease to be. Un-born, eternal, permanent and primeval, It is not killed when the body is killed. (*Bhagavadgītā*, 2.20)

ज्योतिषामपि तज्ज्योतिस्तमसः परमुच्यते ।  
ज्ञानं ज्ञेयं ज्ञानगम्यं हृदि सर्वस्य विष्ठितम् ॥

That is the Light of all lights and is said to be beyond darkness. It is knowledge, knowable and the goal of knowledge. It exists in the heart of all. (*Bhagavadgītā*, 13.17)

The Self is not attached to anything. Pleasure, pain, sinfulness, righteousness, etc can never affect the Self in any way; but they can affect those who identify themselves with the body, as smoke can blacken only the wall, but not the space enclosed within it. (*Sayings of Sri Rama-krishna*, p. 34)

No books, no scriptures, no science can ever imagine the glory of the Self that appears as man, the most glorious God that ever was, the only God that ever existed, exists, or ever will exist. (*Teachings of Swami Vivekananda*, p. 193)



This month's editorial 'Faith in God versus Faith in Oneself' examines the apparent contradiction between the two modes of faith.

'Swami Vivekananda's Idea of Vedanta' by Dr R K Dasgupta is a brilliant analysis of the special features of Swami Vivekananda's presentation of Vedanta. Educated in Calcutta and Oxford, the author has been Vivekananda Professor of Indology at the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata, since April 1994.

In the second and concluding instalment of her article 'Why Do We Suffer?', Pravrajika Sevaprana portrays the spiritual aspect of suffering and discusses its transforming power.

'Science and Spirituality' is the 64th Foundation Day oration at the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata, by Dr Hari Gautam, Chairman of the University Grants Commission, New Delhi. In this thought-provoking address, the author rightly emphasizes the need of spiritual education in this scientific age.

'Self-identity Crisis' by Swami Tattwavidananda is a logical and systematic presentation of the Vedantic view of the real nature of man. The author is an Acharya at the Probationers' Training Centre at Belur Math, the headquarters of the Ramakrishna Order.

The serial 'Religion and Life' concludes with

this issue. We are thankful to Smt Manju Nandi Mazumdar for her Bengali compilation of the spontaneous responses from Srimat Swami Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj (twelfth President of the Ramakrishna Order) to devotees' queries and doubts. Our thanks to Swami Sunirmalanandaji for the English translation.

'Avadhūta Upaniṣad' is the second instalment of the translation of this important Sannyasa Upanishad by Swami Atmapriyanandaji, Principal, Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira, Belur Math. The notes are based on Upanishad Brahmayogin's commentary.

Incidents from the lives of Tiruppāṇ Āzhwār and Kumbhandas are featured this month under 'Glimpses of Holy Lives'.

'Culture of Peace' is a paper presented by Swami Kritarthanandaji at a seminar on Interfaith Dialogue on the Culture of Peace in Mumbai. The paper gives a Hindu view on the subject. The author is a monk of the Ramakrishna Order from its Mumbai centre.

'Principles of Jainism and Practical Vedanta' is a comparative study of some principles of both the philosophies by Swami Brahmeshanandaji, a former editor of *Vedanta Keasari*. The author is presently head of Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, Lusaka, Zambia.

## Prabuddha Bharata—100 Years Ago

### NOTES ON CONCENTRATION

The Karma Yogin is asked to do whatever he does with wholeheartedness, but without attachment. Being wholehearted, he learns to concentrate the mind on anything he likes and being non-attached, he learns also to take the mind away from those things whenever he wills. Thus, by degrees, he gets mastery over his mind and may hope to gain one day the power of abolishing it altogether and become free. ...

When the mind is concentrated whether internally in meditation or externally, when one does any outside work with fully absorbed attention, one has to exert one's utmost to make the mind one-pointed.

—from the article by 'S', May 1902



# Faith in God versus Faith in Oneself

## EDITORIAL

Everyone feels the necessity of God sometime or other. Problems and uncertainties in life, one's pet things slipping through one's fingers, our carefully laid plans going awry—all this makes one wonder whether there is anything more to this humdrum life in the world. One gradually learns to cultivate faith in a superhuman power, call it God or any other name. One begins to search for the Reality behind the phenomenal world. In other words, one starts thinking about spiritual life.

### Faith in God

A childlike faith in God and His redeeming power is considered a prerequisite to spiritual life. Sri Ramakrishna's simple story of the boy Jatila describes this childlike faith. The boy had to walk to school through a forest. Afraid of his lonely trek in the woody stretch, he expressed his fear to his mother. She asked him to call 'Madhusudana', his Elder Brother, whenever he was afraid. He would come and escort him. Next time when the boy was afraid walking alone in the woods, he remembered his mother's words and called out, 'O Brother Madhusudana'. There was no response. He wept aloud: 'Where are you, Brother Madhusudana? Come to me. I am afraid.' God couldn't resist his cry any longer. He appeared before the boy and said: 'Here I am. Why are you frightened?' So saying, he led the boy to his school through the forest. He also assured the boy that He would come whenever he called Him. Sri Ramakrishna would say, 'One must have this faith of a child, this yearning.'<sup>1</sup> He said that God certainly listens to our prayer, nay, He even hears the sound of the anklets on the feet of an ant.<sup>2</sup>

Swami Adbhutananda (Latu Maharaj) was Sri Ramakrishna's wonderful disciple. He

could not write and read even as much as his master did. Yet by sheer obedience to Sri Ramakrishna's words and devoted service to him, he attained heights of spiritual experience. His teachings are completely free from scriptural quotes. Born of his spiritual realizations, they were simple, direct and appealing. A devotee asked him: 'Maharaj, we have not seen God; how can we depend on Him? We do not know how to surrender to Him.' Latu Maharaj replied:

You are asking about prayer. Well, you know God's name; you can begin with his name as your guide. Don't you send your application for a job to the manager of a company without ever having seen him? Your interview with the manager depends upon your sending your application to him. You write the application thus: 'Sir, please appoint me for the job; I shall be extremely happy to serve you; I promise my unswerving obedience to you,' and so on. And you write all this without seeing the manager, don't you?

So, similarly, you can send an application to the Lord. However, this application is not to be written on paper, but on the pages of one's mind.<sup>3</sup>

Again, faith in the protecting power of God (*rakṣiṣyati iti viśvāsaḥ*) is an important mode of self-surrender to God, according to Vaishnava scriptures. Thus faith in God and faith in His name are universally emphasized in the path of devotion.

### Faith in oneself

On the other hand, Swami Vivekananda's talks, conversations and letters—in short, his *Complete Works*—appear to be full of exhortations to cultivate faith in oneself. His utterances on the subject are as forthright as they are inspiring: 'He is an atheist who does not believe in himself. The old religions said that

he was an atheist who did not believe in God. The new religion says that he is the atheist who does not believe in himself.<sup>4</sup> Apparently, Swamiji stresses faith in oneself more than faith in God:

Faith, faith, faith in ourselves, faith, faith in God—this is the secret of greatness. If you have faith in all the three hundred and thirty millions of your mythological gods, and in all the gods which foreigners have now and again introduced into your midst, and still have no faith in yourselves, there is no salvation for you. Have faith in yourselves, and stand up on that faith and be strong; that is what we need (3.190).

Is there any contradiction between having faith in God and having faith in oneself? Are there contradictions in the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda? Does not faith in oneself amount to being egotistic? These important questions deserve a deeper study.

**To discipline the mind, we need to have our locus in an entity that transcends it. Thus, identifying ourselves with a higher dimension in our personality ... is the first step in facing the challenge of befriending and disciplining the mind.**

### **Ego Effacement or Ego Refinement?**

To have a childlike faith in God and regulating one's life accordingly is more easily said than done. A man fell off from a cliff and desperately clung to a tree stump on his way down. Gaining his breath, he shouted: 'Is there anyone up there to help me?' And he heard a deep voice from the heavens: 'Yes, my son. I protect you forever. I can certainly help you. But you must give up your hold first so that I can take over.' The man considered this for a moment and cried out: 'Is there anyone else up there?'

Indeed, when it is a question of one's life and death, giving up all supports and depending only on God is a tall order. The same holds good in less trying circumstances too. We feel we are responsible for our actions. And that is true as long as we look upon ourselves as limited individuals. We need to take the whole re-

sponsibility upon our shoulders. That brings us to the important subject of self-effort. We saw in the last month's editorial the importance of helping oneself to merit God's help.

A beginner in spiritual life thinks ego to be a great impediment and feels concerned about how to root it out, how to live a God-centred life. He needs to remember that ego effacement pertains to a very advanced stage of spiritual life. He would rather do well to try to refine his ego and strengthen it, far from worrying about effacing it. This refined ego, which Sri Ramakrishna referred to as the 'ripe ego', is a great tool in one's spiritual struggles. In fact it makes the struggle possible in the first place. Let us hear Sri Ramakrishna:

I said to Kesab, 'You must renounce your ego.' Keshab replied, 'If I do, how can I keep my organization together?'

I said to him: 'How slow you are to understand! I am not asking you to renounce the "ripe

ego", the ego that makes a man feel he is a servant of God or His devotee. Give up the "unripe ego", the ego that creates attachment to "woman and gold". The ego that makes a man feel he is God's servant, His child, is the "ripe ego". It doesn't harm one.'<sup>5</sup>

### **Faith in Oneself a Prerequisite for Mind Discipline**

Spiritual life begins with the cultivation of *buddhi*, our discriminative faculty. It is with the help of *buddhi* that one can hope to train and discipline the mind—and give a new turn to its old ways. This becomes possible only when one has a strong will, an attribute of *buddhi*.

The undisciplined, wayward mind makes us more and more entangled in the sensory world. It acts against our spiritual interests. As long as the mind does not cooperate with us in implementing our resolutions on

the path to perfection—which is the case with the majority—the mind continues to be our enemy. The challenge is to make the enemy mind our friend. But that involves disciplining the mind, training it in new ways. The same mind which acted against our interests as our enemy, becomes our friend when controlled, says Sri Krishna.<sup>6</sup>

To discipline the mind, we need to have our locus in an entity that transcends it. Thus, identifying ourselves with a higher dimension in our personality—something beyond and different from the rebelling mind—is the first step in facing the challenge of befriending and disciplining the mind. The more this identity grows in us, the more developed becomes the *buddhi*. Having faith in and identifying ourselves with this friendly mind helps us understand better the mind and its functions. It is *buddhi* that steers us in our path towards perfection.

Sri Krishna traces in the *Bhagavadgītā* the hierarchy of human personality from the sense organs upwards:

The (subtle) sense organs are said to be superior (to the body); the *manas* (mind) is superior to the sense organs; the *buddhi* (intellect) is superior to the *manas*; the Self is superior to the *buddhi*.<sup>7</sup>

Thus *buddhi* or the friendly mind, is close to the Atman, our real divine nature. Hence identity with it and faith in its powers amount to tapping the spiritual reserves latent in our real nature.

Does not faith in ourselves make us more egotistic? No, if we are sincere in our spiritual practice. The apparent egotism born of faith in oneself is of a higher type and is directed towards obstacles to the manifestation of our real nature. It is cultivated with reference to the sense objects, the body, the subtle sense organs and the mind, with a view to developing detachment from them. While adopting an apparently egotistic attitude towards his uncontrolled mind, the aspirant surrenders his struggles and their results also to the indwelling Divinity. On the other hand, a mere 'lip faith' in God, not preceded by faith in oneself,

can only make a person weak, making him succumb to the pull of the mind and the senses. And the Atman cannot be realized by weaklings, says the Upanishad.<sup>8</sup>

Swamiji repeatedly drove home this message of strength from the Upanishads. He considered strength as the yardstick in any training:

This is the one question I put to every man, woman, or child, when they are in physical, mental, or spiritual training. Are you strong? Do you feel strength?—for I know it is truth alone that gives strength. I know that truth alone gives life, and nothing but going towards reality will make us strong, and none will reach truth until he is strong.<sup>9</sup>

He held that brooding over weakness is not the remedy for weakness, but thinking of strength, born of one's real nature. His inspiring words from his wonderful lecture 'The Open Secret' are a perennial source of strength, which every spiritual aspirant would do well to tap:

... whenever darkness comes, assert the reality and everything adverse must vanish. ... Fear not—it is banished. Crush it, and it vanishes. Stamp upon it, and it dies. Be not afraid. Think not how many times you fail. Never mind. Time is infinite. Go forward; assert yourself again and again, and light must come. (2.403)

Elsewhere, Swamiji advocates merciless rejection of any source of weakness:

And here is the test of truth—anything that makes you weak physically, intellectually, and spiritually, reject as poison; there is no life in it, it cannot be true. Truth is strengthening. Truth is purity, truth is all-knowledge; truth must be strengthening, must be enlightening, must be invigorating. (3.224-5)

Thus we see that having faith in oneself comes closer to having faith in God, who resides in the heart of all beings.<sup>10</sup> Swamiji's exhortation to have faith in oneself needs to be understood in this context. After giving his celebrated definition of an atheist—one who does not believe in himself—Swamiji makes it clear that 'it is not selfish faith, because the

Vedanta, again, is the doctrine of oneness. It means faith in all, because you are all'.<sup>11</sup>

### Sri Ramakrishna on Inner Grit

Let us see how faith in oneself—based on faith in God and His name—formed an important part of Sri Ramakrishna's teachings too. One finds in the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* repeated reference to prayer. Sri Ramakrishna himself prays to the Divine Mother for devotion, strength, love for God, and so on, as if to teach us, spiritual aspirants. The following saying of his underlines the importance of a firm resolve by a spiritual aspirant not to repeat his sins.

Suppose a man becomes pure by chanting the holy name of God, but immediately afterwards commits many sins. *He has no strength of mind. He doesn't take a vow not to repeat his sins.* A bath in the Ganges undoubtedly absolves one of all sins; but what does it avail? They say that the sins perch on the trees along the bank of the Ganges. No sooner does the man come back from the holy waters than the old sins jump on his shoulders from the trees.<sup>12</sup> [Emphasis added.]

Sri Ramakrishna encouraged a positive mental attitude contrasted with that which makes one harp on weakness and sin. Here are his words addressed to a Brahmo devotee:

A man is free if he constantly thinks: 'I am a free soul. How can I be bound, whether I live in the world or in the forest? I am a child of God, the King of Kings. Who can bind me?' ... by repeating with grit and determination, 'I am not bound, I am free', one really becomes so—one really becomes free. ... The wretch who constantly says, 'I am bound, I am bound' only succeeds in being bound. He who says day and night, 'I am a sinner, I am a sinner' verily becomes a sinner. (138)

His following teaching, though apparently advocating faith in God's name, really emphasizes faith in oneself, based on faith in God.

One should have such burning faith in God that one can say: 'What? I have repeated the name of

God, and can sin still cling to me? How can I be a sinner any more? How can I be in bondage any more? (138)

He advised people to have a contract with God, as it were, not to return to their bad ways. Addressing Vijaykrishna Goswami, he said, 'God is our Father and Mother. Tell Him, "O Lord, I have committed sins, but I won't repeat them."' (159)

\* \* \*

To sum up. When God is understood to be present within oneself—even if this is just a working hypothesis—there is not much difference between faith in God and faith in one's real Self. In other words, if faith in God has to effect transformation in our personality, it needs to be bolstered up with faith in ourselves, stemming from our divine nature. Such faith in ourselves endows us with the necessary strength to fight and discipline the unruly mind, which on chastening will lead us from the unreal to the Real, from darkness to Light and from death to Immortality. \*

### References

1. M., *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1985), p. 338. [Hereafter *Gospel*.]
2. *ibid.*, p. 916.
3. Swami Chetanananda, *Swami Adbhutananda: Teachings and Reminiscences* (St Louis: Vedanta Society of St Louis, 1980), pp. 140-1.
4. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989; 9, 1997), vol. 2, p. 301. [Hereafter CW, followed by volume and page numbers.]
5. *Gospel*, p. 790.
6. *Bhagavadgītā*, 6.6. [Hereafter *Gītā*.]
7. *ibid.*, 3.42.
8. *Nāyamātmā balahinena labhyaḥ...*, *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*, 3.2.4.
9. CW, 2. 201.
10. *Gītā*, 18.61.
11. CW, 2.301.
12. *Gospel*, p. 190.



# Swami Vivekananda's Idea of Vedanta

R K DASGUPTA

My knowledge of Vedanta, I should say my sense of it, is how I have seen it as a dark-idol worshipping Bengali of the lower Gangetic delta. When I call myself an idol worshipper I don't mean to say that I am idolatrous in the sense that Christian missionaries used to accuse all Hindus of practising a gross form of idolatry. I only mean that there is a place for images in our family's religious life. Our family deity is the Divine Mother and we have Her image at our place of worship. I remember in our Thursday evening songs there were verses saying that the Mother was not to be found in that image. One

of these songs was Rāmprasād Sen's which said: 'Fashion Her image with the stuff of mind and set it on the lotus-throne of your heart.'<sup>1</sup>

This made us believe that while having an image of the Mother you go beyond the image and find Her in your mind. Obviously as young boys we had no occasion to go into the theology or the philosophy of this idea. But I do remember that our elders

thought that this 'stuff of mind' was important in religion and worship. As we grew older we heard the word Vedanta uttered by our elders. But they were not Vedantic scholars. Our family library in those days—in the 1930s, to be precise—did not contain a single Vedantic text, the *Brahma Sūtras*, or its medieval commentaries. There were only Bengali editions of some Upaniṣads.

What brought us a little closer to this common idea of Vedanta was a song which we often sang without ever knowing who its author was. The words were:

*Ei karo hari, dīnadayāmay  
tumi āmi jeno duṭi nāhi hoy;  
Jaleri taraṅga jale karo loy  
cidghana śyāmasundara.*

O Hari, kind saviour of the lowly, see that Thou and I are not two. Let the waves of the sea dissolve in the sea, O Śyāmasundara of our heart.

What struck us as paradoxical was that we were addressing the Mother as a male god; secondly, even while desiring merger with the Deity and becoming one with Him we ended by invoking Him as the lord of our heart. Obviously these were just mild questions and we did not press for an answer. And we never put

Vivekananda  
discovered his Vedanta  
in the teachings of Sri  
Ramakrishna, in his  
words and his silences,  
in his tears and smiles, in  
his very pulse-beat. And  
he preached that  
Vedanta abroad and at  
home.

the question to our elders. Perhaps there was some melody in the words which silenced all questions. Another song we were told about was a Vedantic song, a song of Rāmprasād's, was: 'Sugar I love to eat, but I have no wish to become sugar.'<sup>2</sup>

As a student of English literature I found this verse of the 18th century Bengali Śākta poet in Somerset Maugham's *The Razor's Edge* (1944) where Larry quotes it and says, by way of commenting on it, 'What is individuality but an expression of our egoism? Until the soul has shed the last trace of that, it cannot become one with the Absolute.'<sup>3</sup> When I read this novel in 1945 I had acquainted myself with some of the Vedantic texts and I could take Larry's comment as an Advaita Vedantic statement, or a severely monistic view of the Supreme Reality. Nevertheless, I thought that in our younger days even if our songs were Vedantic we were worshipping a Personal God; we were not concerned with the

Supreme Reality. And going back to Rāmprasād's songs I found that while he preferred to taste sugar to being sugar he was not repudiating the idea of being sugar. For him spiritual life was a question of choice between tasting sugar and being sugar, and he preferred the first.

### Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Vedanta

I am immodestly taking you to my personal and very ordinary religious sense because my idea of Vedanta was rooted in this sense. It was in 1945 that I began to read what we today call Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature. It was from the

*prasthāna-traya* of that literature — the three classics of it — Maheन्द्रanath Gupta's *Kathāmṛta*, Swami Saradananda's *Līlā-prasaṅga* and the *Complete Works* of Swami Vivekananda, that I acquired my idea of Vedanta. What struck me in these works (and I look upon them as a *summa philosophica* of the entire Vedantic tradition) is that a person sitting before an image and singing songs of both eating and tasting sugar could call himself a Vedantist. I thought that though Vivekananda was widely and deeply read in Vedantic literature, his philosophy of Vedanta consisted of what he had learnt from his master Sri Ramakrishna. While others speak of Śaṅkara Vedanta or Rāmānuja Vedanta or Madhva Vedanta, I speak of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Vedanta. Christopher Isherwood (1904-1986) calls Sri Ramakrishna 'Vedanta's greatest human exemplar.'<sup>4</sup> Vivekananda discovered his Vedanta in the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, in his words and his silences, in his tears and smiles, in his very

pulse-beat. And he preached that Vedanta abroad and at home.

When I reflect on this I feel happy that in my younger days there was nothing non-Vedantic in our unenlightened religious life. We were Vedantic without being aware of it. I should reiterate that in our younger days we had no knowledge of any Vedantic texts except Bengali editions of some Upaniṣads.

### The Vedantic Tradition

While summing up Swami Vivekananda's ideas on Vedanta in order to arrive at his view of the Vedanta philosophy, I ask myself a

When you examine Swami Vivekananda's observations on Vedanta, the first thing you notice is his reliance on the Upanishads in preference to the *Brahma Sūtras* and its commentaries. Secondly, you notice that he does not favour a fragmentation of Vedanta into different systems—Advaita, Viśiṣṭadvaita, and Dvaita. He knew these systems or schools and he valued them, but he himself took a holistic view of Vedanta.

first question: What is Vedanta, what texts constitute the Vedantic canon? By Vedantic literature we mean the entire corpus of works written on Vedanta in Sanskrit, in our vernaculars and in any language of the world. But we should identify some texts as the canon of Vedanta. In our tradition canonical texts are scriptural texts and therefore they are revelations or *śruti*. The problem is that the *R̥g Veda* is also a *śruti*. On

the other hand, amongst the three constituents of what we call the *prasthāna-traya*, the Upaniṣads alone are *śruti*, the *Bhagavadgītā* and the *Brahma Sūtras* being *smṛti* and *nyāya* texts respectively. And a Vedantist who is known to have a command of all aspects of Vedanta will have read the vast commentaries on the *Brahma Sūtras* produced by philosophers like Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja, and Madhva. In our medieval vernacular poetry, that is our mystical songs, there is an expression of a profoundly Vedantic experience. It is said that Rāmānuja's Viśiṣṭadvaita Vedanta was inspired by Tamil Āḷvār poetry. Surendranath Dasgupta finds

the Āḷvārs to be so important in the history of Vedanta philosophy that he devotes to them one whole chapter, Chapter XVII, in the fourth volume of his *History of Indian Philosophy*. In this chapter Dr Dasgupta says that Rāmānuja 'drew much information and food for his system of thought' from 'the works of the Āḷvārs'.<sup>5</sup> J S M Hooper, who made a special study of Āḷvār poetry, says: 'The Āḷvārs provided the soil out of which Rāmānuja's teaching naturally sprang, and in which later it could bear fruit.'<sup>6</sup>

I am citing a few details of the entire Vedantic tradition in India and its reflection in Indian literature because I believe that Swami Vivekananda had this long tradition in view

when he made known to the world his own idea of Vedanta. He was acquainted with the Sanskrit sources of this philosophy from the Upaniṣads to the medieval commentaries. But when he spoke of his philosophy of religion, which was essentially Vedantic, he had in mind not only the Purāṇic tradition including the *Bhāgavata* but also the reflection of it in our vernacular poetry. Above all,

he found in Sri Ramakrishna a living embodiment of the true spirit of Vedanta. I know that to say this is to take the Vedanta away from the great system of Vedanta philosophy with its subtle bearings on metaphysics, logic, ethics, and psychology. There is also the question of Vedanta's relation with Sāṅkhya. There is now a vast literature on this in the major languages of the world. Swami Vivekananda was acquainted with at least a part of it. He knew about Schopenhauer's response to the Upaniṣads. He quotes Schopenhauer's words on the Upaniṣads in his *Parerga und Paralipomena* (1851) in his first public address in the East given in Colombo on 15 January 1897 (*Complete Works*, vol. 3, p. 109) and he was appreciative of Max Muller and Deussen's writings on

Vedanta philosophy. We have reason to think that Vivekananda was capable of a severely analytical approach to philosophical questions, though obviously he could not be too analytical and too subtle in his public addresses. His style is often that of an apostolic preacher—simple and lucid.

### Vivekananda's Holistic View

When you examine Swami Vivekananda's observations on Vedanta, the first thing you notice is his reliance on the Upaniṣads in preference to the *Brahma Sūtras* and its commentaries. Secondly, you notice that he does not favour a fragmentation of Vedanta into different systems—Advaita, Viśiṣṭādvaita,

and Dvaita. He knew these systems or schools and he valued them, but he himself took a holistic view of Vedanta. 'It would be wrong,' he said in his Lahore address of 12 November 1897,

to confine the word Vedanta only to one system which has arisen out of the Upaniṣads. All these are covered by the word Vedanta. The Viśiṣṭādvaitist has as much right to be called a Vedantist as the Advaitist.<sup>7</sup>

When he gave a new dimension and a new depth to Vedanta philosophy, when he developed his Neo-Vedanta without in any way distorting its basic principles, he only affirmed his faith in evolution and progress.

A statement such as this raises a question: If Advaita and Dvaita are both Vedantic systems, which system is Vivekananda's own? Vivekananda's answer would be that all the systems are valid and he would call them all his own. In the broad spectrum of man's spiritual life there are many shades and hues and not one of them can be rejected. But if you would press him to tell you if he is a Dvaitin or an Advaitin he would say that Advaita is the highest altitude of spiritual life and Viśiṣṭādvaita and Dvaita are only steps towards it. However, he would add that each step is a Vedantic step and one might not reach the highest altitude and yet have no regrets. In his Harvard address on 'The Vedanta Philosophy' given on 25 March 1896 he said about the

Vedantic system that

there have been various interpretations, and to my mind they have been progressive, beginning with the dualistic or Dvaita and ending with the non-dualistic or Advaita. (1.357)

### Continuing Revelation of the Spirit

Actually Vivekananda had an idea of evolution in the history of both our philosophy and religion. He never made any distinction between the two. While he looked upon Vedanta as a flowering of Indian thought, he also believed in a re-flowering of that thought in later ages. When he gave a new dimension and a new depth to Vedanta philosophy,

when he developed his Neo-Vedanta without in any way distorting its basic principles, he only affirmed his faith in evolution and progress. In his address 'The Spirit and Influence of Vedanta' he says:

It [Vedanta] is ... the very flower of all the speculations and experiences and analyses ... in that mass of literature [the Vedas] — collected and culled through centuries. (1. 387)

This shows how Vivekananda viewed religion as a living and growing institution and how it could have a variety of forms. The human spirit ascends towards its fulfilment through various forms and stages. Even non-Vedantic rituals and ceremonies are steps towards the Vedantic goal. In his address 'The Practice of Religion' given at Alameda, California, on 18 April 1900, Vivekananda said: 'Prayers, ceremonials and all the other forms of worship are simply kindergartens of meditation.' (4.249)

What gave Swami Vivekananda his confident sense of freedom in interpreting

Vedanta was his idea of a continuing revelation by which he meant the endless creativity of the human spirit. In his address 'The Way to the Realization of a Universal Religion' given at the Universalist Church, Pasadena, California, on 28 January 1900, Vivekananda said:

... I shall keep my heart open for all that may come in the future. Is God's book finished? Or is it still a continuous revelation going on? It is a marvellous book—these spiritual revelations of the world. The Bible, the Vedas, the Koran, and all other sacred books are so many pages, and an infinite number of pages remain yet to be unfolded. (2.374)

Vivekananda felt free to develop his Vedanta from the Upanishads, free from the dialectical and sectarian constraints of the Vedanta of the commentators. Reflecting on the teachings of his master Ramakrishna and keeping in view the Vedantic foundation of the religious ideas and sensibilities of his people he took a comprehensive, catholic view of the philosophy which he found to be the philosophical base of even popular religion.

Obviously, by the Vedas Vivekananda meant Vedanta (the Upanishads) also. This idea of a continuous revelation is rooted in the Vedantic idea of the infinitude of the Atman.

### His Method of Interpretation

Let us now consider Swami Vivekananda's method of interpreting Vedanta, or the logic of his philosophy of Vedanta. A Vedantist is necessarily a mystic—a person

who understands that his knowledge is *anirvacaniya*, or ineffable, inexpressible. Still in human discourse there is a method of explaining one's viewpoint. I think, on the whole, Vivekananda's idea of the nature of philosophy resembles Bertrand Russell's analysis of thought. In his essay 'Mysticism and Logic' Russell says:

Instinct, intuition or insight is what first leads to the beliefs which subsequent reason confirms and confutes. ... Reason is a harmonizing, controlling force than a creative one.<sup>8</sup>

Russell relates this idea of the primacy of intu-

ition in philosophy in his *Our Knowledge of the External World* (1914), where he says that even in the 'most purely logical realms, it is insight that first arrives at what is new'.<sup>9</sup> I don't mean to suggest that Russell was a mystic or a Bergsonian intuitionist. Russell would dismiss as nonsense whatever is not sustained by reason. What I wish to say is that Russell believes that intuition is the beginning of philosophy, and that is Vivekananda's view also. Vivekananda knows that the insights, intuitions or visions of the Upaniṣadic sages are necessarily sustainable by reason. He thinks that Vedantic intuition may be explained logically. And when you say that the Advaitic experience or state cannot be explained verbally, you don't simply take leave of reason; you may only say that you are *reasonably* taking leave of reason. Vivekananda rejects the Kantian idea of reason as the *only* instrument of human knowledge. He thinks it is irrational to so exalt reason as a faculty.

### Dualistic Schools Also Belong to Vedanta

When I say that Vivekananda gives us a new view of Vedanta as a Neo-Vedantist, I stress two important features of his Vedanta philosophy. The first is that all forms of Vedanta—Advaita, Viśiṣṭādvaita, Dvaita or Dvaitādvaita—may be given the status of Vedanta. The medieval Vedantic philosophers would not have agreed to this. Śaṅkara, an exponent of non-duality or monism, would not accept Dvaita as Vedanta, and a Dvaitin would not accept Advaita as true Vedanta. Vivekananda even said that medieval Vedantists could be accused of text-torturing in establishing their view of Vedanta as the true Vedanta. For the essence of Vedanta, Vivekananda turns to the Upaniṣads—which offer a variety of Vedantic ideas—and not

Bādarāyaṇa's *Brahma Sūtras* or its many commentators. There is a notion that the word Vedanta was first used by the commentators. Actually the word occurs in the Upaniṣads, for example, '*Vedānte paramaṁ guhyam purākalpe pracoditam*' in the *Svetāśvatara Upaniṣad* (6.22) and '*Vedānta-vijñāna-suniścītārthāḥ*' in the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* (3.2.6). Vivekananda felt free to develop his Vedanta from the Upaniṣads, free from the dialectical and sectarian constraints of the Vedanta of the commentators. Reflecting on the teachings of his master Ramakrishna and keeping in view the Vedantic foundation of the religious ideas and sen-

sibilities of his people, he took a comprehensive, catholic view of the philosophy, which he found to be the philosophical base of even popular religion.

### The Basis of a Universal Religion

The second important feature of Vivekananda's Neo-Vedanta is his idea that it could be the philosophical foundation of a Universal Religion. What he meant by Universal Religion he explains at many places in his works, and particularly in his two addresses, 'The Way to

the Realization of a Universal Religion' and 'The Ideal of a Universal Religion', both included in the second volume of his *Complete Works*. By Universal Religion he does not mean a new eclectic theology. The underlying principle of his religion is that 'unity in variety is the plan of the universe.'<sup>10</sup> He makes it clear that by Universal Religion he does not mean 'any one universal philosophy, or any one universal mythology, or any one universal ritual held alike by all.'<sup>11</sup> A follower of the ideal of a Universal Religion is not expected to renounce his faith: he will remain a Christian, a Muslim, a Hindu or a Buddhist. But he will have a

A follower of the ideal of a Universal Religion is not expected to renounce his faith: he will remain a Christian, a Muslim, a Hindu or a Buddhist. But he will have a sense of the universality of the human spirit, of the infinitude of the human soul in its divine essence, which is a Vedantic idea.



sense of the universality of the human spirit, of the infinitude of the human soul in its divine essence, which is a Vedantic idea. Vivekananda did not look upon Vedanta as a dogma or a doctrine: it is a sensibility, a spiritual temper that gives one's religion its universality. Vedanta takes a man above sect and dogma and enables him to breathe the ampler and fresher air of the upper skies of his faith from where he can realize his freedom. I think Vivekananda would agree with Deussen who says about the Vedantic Atman that 'it is the metaphysical unity which is manifested in all empirical plurality.'<sup>12</sup>

### His View on His Advaita Vedanta

One question, however, remains. What is Vivekananda's view of his own Advaita Vedanta? In his Harvard address on 'The Vedanta Philosophy' Vivekananda says that the majority of the Indian people are Dvaitists and only a few are Advaitists.<sup>13</sup> The Advaita experience or state is inexpressible. Actually the expression 'Advaita experience' may not be a logical expression. '*Tat tvam asi, Śvetaketo*'<sup>14</sup> and '*Iyam aham asmi*'<sup>15</sup> are not expressions of experiences, they are not sentences in the indicative mood. They only express an aspiration. When the individual or the personal Atman is merged in Brahman, who will communicate the event! We can state the idea of the Atman dissolving in the Paramātmān. We can't report the event. Vivekananda has this idea in mind when he does not speak about his own Advaita. Let us remember that when Rabindranath Tagore speaks of Advaita in his poem included in *Janmadine* he only speaks of a future and desired experience:

*Āmār āmār dhārā miśe jābe krame  
paripūrṇa caitanyer sāgar saṅgama.*

The stream of my personal self will gradually

mix with the fullness of the Supreme Consciousness.

He is not communicating an experience: he is only speaking of an aspiration.

Vivekananda does not speak at length on Advaita though Advaita is the basis of his catholic view of Vedanta and his idea of a Universal Religion. \*

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Man is to become divine by realizing the divine; idols or temples or churches or books are only the supports, the helps, of his spiritual childhood; but on and on he must progress.

—Swami Vivekananda, CW, 1.16

# Why Do We Suffer?

PRAVRAJIKA SEVAPRANA

(continued from the previous issue)

There is the famous prayer of Kunti, the mother of the Pandava brothers, which you find in the *Mahabharata*. When Sri Krishna granted her a boon, she prayed that she would always have adversity. When he asked her why she asked for this strange boon, she replied, 'O Krishna, whenever I am in adversity I always remember you. You are the first one I turn to, the first thought in my mind. Therefore let me always remain in adversity.' We can actually use suffering to turn towards God. And if we do that, it can help us when we meet problems in life. I am not advocating seeking suffering. We will get plenty without that. We all have our own hair shirts handed out to us tailor-made. But whenever we have pain or encounter a painful situation of any sort, we can try to remember to call on God, or assert our own higher nature.

## Suffering, a Tool for Inner Transformation

Swamiji tells us, 'But it is a tremendous truth that if there be real worth in you, the more are circumstances against you, the more will that inner power manifest itself.'<sup>1</sup> So suffering certainly can be turned into a spiritual advantage for a true aspirant. If the body suffers we can tell ourselves, 'I am not the body.' We can make that our spiritual practice. Every twinge can be a reminder. When something is wrenching our heart we can analyse it and try to understand where we are sticking to it, what is causing us pain. It is said that the tree which is shaken in a storm develops strong roots. Storms and stresses in life can actually strengthen our resolve. So they say, 'If old age comes, disease comes, difficulties, external and internal, arise, if we have the power of endurance to remain calm and bear our burden

without being bowed down by it, then we have really achieved something.'<sup>2</sup>

Even the little things in everyday life can be used to build up our inner strength. St Theresa said one must 'die by pin stabs'<sup>3</sup> and often it is just that. Nothing big and showy to be done, just the little things, when we are already tired or busy or too rushed to take the time. Things that nobody notices, but one knows inside, can be done in a better way. These are the hard things. So often we fail. This is where the struggle takes place. We sometimes feel, 'Yes, Lord, I do want to be purified.' We desire some heroic noble sacrifice that everyone will notice. It is humbling to realize that it is these little things that are being asked. We feel, 'O God, does it have to be like this? Do I really have to get along with this difficult person? Do I really have to give up my resentment? Do I really have to curb my tongue? You mean this is what you want from me now?' Unfortunately the answer often is, 'Yes. This is it.' They say, 'Do it now.' How true it is. The path, the opportunities, are right here for every one of us, in our families, in our work, in our convents and monasteries, in our homes. This doesn't mean doing things with a sigh and a martyred attitude. No, it really means doing with love and therefore with joy.

Does the way we face suffering also affect how others view us? Here is a quote from Mahatma Gandhi's autobiography:

The conviction has been growing upon me, that things of fundamental importance to the people are not secured by reason alone but have to be purchased with their suffering. Suffering is the law of human beings; war is the law of the jungle. But suffering is infinitely more powerful than the law of the jungle for converting the op-

ponent and opening his ears, which are otherwise shut, to the voice of reason. ... I have come to this fundamental conclusion that if you want something really important to be done you must not merely satisfy the reason. You must move the heart also. The appeal to reason is more to the head but the penetration of the heart comes from suffering. It opens up the inner understanding in man.

What does this mean? It means that suffering can transform a person and those around him. Things borne with patience and forbearance yield great inner strength to oneself and also have an effect on others. Somehow suffering can open the human heart to compassion. When a person truly sacrifices himself with joy and love, all hearts respond to him. A truly compassionate person understands the suffering of another and the other person feels this even if it is not overtly expressed. Sri Ramakrishna tells us that as *maya* exists so also does *daya* or compassion. Our attachment to our relatives brings sorrow when we want something in return. This is called *maya* by Sri Ramakrishna.

*Maya* is love for one's relatives, one's wife, children, brother, sister, nephew, father and mother. But *Daya* is the same love for all created beings without any distinction. *Maya* entangles a man, turns him away from God. But through *Daya* one realizes God.<sup>4</sup>

There is only one love manifesting in various ways. It is 'me' and 'myself' that is the problem. There is a practice where one tries to see all women as mothers or sisters and all men as fathers or brothers. In Buddhism one practice is to realize that all beings have been our mothers and fathers at some time in our evolution. We need to broaden our love. We must turn our love towards all, towards God in all, in our relatives and friends yes, but also even in our enemies. And we should nourish the feeling of compassion towards all. 'As I am, so are they.'

Suffering can broaden the heart. One can sympathize and understand the suffering of others. It not only gives strength, as heat tem-

pers iron into steel, but also polishes off the corners and gives depth to the soul. We all must have seen sometime or other a piece of old wood which has become so smooth and mellow that it almost seems to glow with age. It has become this way by being repeatedly touched and used. Drift wood buffeted by waves and bleached by the sun is white and smooth. A river stone can become polished and almost luminous because of continuous friction with other stones. It shines. Sometimes the faces of the old and sick are like this—almost translucent, where the light behind seems very close to the surface, ready to burst through at any moment.

### Suffering versus Sacrifice

The whole life can be viewed as a great sacrifice, or *yajna*. The *Chandogya Upanishad* says, 'A man indeed is a sacrifice.'<sup>5</sup> Every action offers us an opportunity to sacrifice ourselves. Swami Vivekananda says,

It is easier to reconcile one's fate as a sacrifice. We are all sacrifices—each in his own way. The great worship is going on—no one can see its meaning except that it is a great sacrifice. Those that are willing, escape a lot of pain. Those who resist are broken into submission and suffer more. I am now determined to be a willing one.<sup>6</sup>

When Brother Lawrence was going through a difficult period he found that he did not get relief until he stopped struggling.

When I thought of nothing but to end my days in those troubles I found myself changed all at once; and my soul, which till that time was in trouble, felt a profound inward peace,<sup>7</sup> as if she were in her centre and place of rest.

But this sacrifice should be a joyful one. Remember, we are all seeking happiness. Can we offer ourselves joyfully? Can our lives be a joyful offering—whether the circumstances are easy or difficult? If there is love, life becomes joyful like a song. All things can be faced with joy by a truly advanced spiritual seeker because there is love in all his actions and no fear.

How much fear do we still have in us? Just ask yourselves, 'If I knew I was going to die the next day, what would I do? What would I feel?' Be honest. Would we panic? Would fear rise in us? Can we really say, 'Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me?'<sup>8</sup> Most of us have a way to go about this. This is the question of clinging to life. But what about a painful illness?

St Francis says: 'Suffering, if you accept it lovingly, can give intensity to one's prayer which nothing else can give.' St Theresa says, 'Love lives only on sacrifice; so, if one is completely dedicated to loving, one must expect to be sacrificed unreservedly.'

Wait a minute. Are we back to some sort of pain-hugging religious idea? No. I want to stress this. Sacrifice does not necessarily mean pain. If it is done with love it will bring joy. This is the great key. Listen to these words from a conversation with the Dalai Lama:

Questioner: Your Holiness always says that suffering increases your inner strength.

Dalai Lama: That is right.

Questioner: But some people might think: Well then, I should seek more suffering in order to become stronger.

Dalai Lama (laughing): This I don't mean.

Questioner: But voluntary suffering in a way, isn't that what it is? Don't bodhisattvas sometimes seek suffering on purpose?

Dalai Lama: Oh yes, they do. 'I want to take on myself all the sufferings of living beings.' They directly enter into suffering that way. But in that case, you see, actually the suffering doesn't come!

Questioner: Ah! Is that so? When they seek the suffering, they don't get any?

Dalai Lama: No. Never. The wishing for suffering makes the suffering disappear.

That is it. The wishing for suffering, the willing sacrifice, makes the suffering itself disappear. It seems that suffering is really just our resistance to something. If we are asked to give and we resist, we suffer. If we are asked to sacrifice and we are unwilling, we suffer. If we are asked to give and we give willingly, it is a

joy. Swamiji in his poem 'To a Friend' says, 'Give, give away.'<sup>9</sup> That's the one thing. We are constantly being asked to give ourselves. If we give without being asked it is even more of a joy. I ask you again to look at your own mind and see it. Often when we suffer, this unwillingness to give is the cause of it. Something in us is resisting, grabbing and holding. If that resistance goes, the suffering goes with it. They say that clinging to life itself is a source of suffering.

Pavahari Baba, a great saint, was bitten by a cobra. He fell down unconscious. He survived the poison. When he came back to consciousness, and was asked what had happened, he said, 'A messenger came from my Beloved.'

### Love and Suffering

St Theresa, who was actually dying of tuberculosis, said to her sisters:

Oh! Don't be troubled about me, for I have come to a point where I cannot suffer any longer, because all suffering is sweet to me. Whatever is God's will pleases me. I love everything God in his goodness sends me.<sup>10</sup>

What a wonderful state of mind! How free, to see that everything is God's will and to feel that anything that God wills is sweet!

What is the significance of Christ on the cross? That he overcame death. Who can really answer this question? Was he human as well as divine? Christ was denied by his close disciples and friends, publicly humiliated, and crucified. Surely, any human being would have suffered in that situation. What does this mean to us? What do the words 'Take up your cross and follow me' really mean? This great mystery is something one needs to meditate on deeply to even begin to understand. One can only understand a little from within as the heart opens. But surely we are being asked to give up, to sacrifice our little small egos. Surely the small ego is the reason we are suffering.

It is one thing to face our own suffering and try to rise above it, but how about the suf-

ferings of others? A loved one suffers a great loss or is completely immobilized by a mental illness. We feel helpless. How can we understand such a thing? I don't say we can really understand it, but we can open our hearts for other people and try to reduce their suffering. 'As I am, so are they. As they are, so am I.' We can try to see God in them and serve.

On a larger scale, what about things such as the worldwide tremendous social and economic imbalance? What about wars or atrocities such as the Holocaust or what is going on in Tibet or in the Middle East right now? What about diseases that wipe out millions of people?

### A Spiritual Perspective

One view is to try to step back, see the whole picture as a great cosmic sacrifice. Somebody said recently that in an epic such as the *Mahabharata* one gets a cosmic view like this. Everything is interconnected and meets on the great battlefield. Good and evil are mixed up in the cosmic conflict. And one must fight in the midst of it all. People being born and dying, wars and joyous celebrations, good and evil, always together in a cosmic dance. Even the birth and death of the universe is just part of this Divine Play. This existence of ours is as transient as autumn clouds. To watch the birth and death of beings is like looking at the movements of a dance. A lifetime is like a flash of lightning in the sky, rushing by like a torrent down a steep mountain. From one standpoint it is just the play of Consciousness—the divine, blissful play of Mother Kali, who holds both joy and sorrow, birth and death, in her hands, and who is dancing the dance of creation as well as destruction.

It is true that worldwide calamities can also arouse the feeling of compassion in many people. To a greater or lesser degree it can open our eyes to see that even the perpetrators of such violence are suffering, perhaps even more than the victims because they are caught in a hell of anger, hatred and violence. Violent

actions frighten us so much because we all carry the seeds of violence within us. Remember, we are very much the same, imprisoned by our own anger, resentments and fear. Are we non-violent within ourselves? Have we overcome anger?

What about the suffering of those who appear to be completely innocent? This quotation from a conversation with Mother Teresa of Kolkata gives us one viewpoint:

At one point towards the end of the journey, I asked her how she or anyone could explain why children needed to suffer. She thought momentarily and said, 'Our Lord's suffering was a device chosen by him to show to the world the path out of affliction. Similarly, when children suffer, their suffering is possibly meant to compel humanity to act on their behalf, and thus to serve as its own saviour.'

What an interesting thought! By giving up oneself for others, one saves oneself.

This selfless service is one of the ways to overcome our own suffering. Swami Vivekananda says,

First root out this idea of helping, and then go to worship. ... Serve the living God! God comes to you in the blind, in the halt, in the poor, in the weak, in the diabolical.<sup>11</sup>

It is not the receiver that is blessed, but it is the giver. Be thankful that you are allowed to exercise your power of benevolence and mercy in the world, and thus become pure and perfect.<sup>12</sup>

In our own time, Sri Ramakrishna died of throat cancer. Did he really suffer? Some feel he never suffered; that he was always aware of his true divine nature. Yet look at the picture of his body taken at the time of his death. His body was emaciated till it was just skin and bones. Anyone who has been near a cancer patient knows that there can be a great deal of pain and suffering there. Yet those who were near Sri Ramakrishna say that he was all bliss. How wonderful! What a message! These great ones show us how to overcome body consciousness, even disease and death. Yes, even a lingering, painful illness like cancer can be overcome. A person can live free even while



living in a body. There can be an end to sorrow. An incarnation comes. God takes on a human form in order to show mankind the way to overcome suffering and death. There is something that does not die and never suffers.

To be an embodied being means to take on suffering. Even incarnations do this. But our suffering itself, if properly turned, can lead us back to our own true nature. Why do we suffer? Because we are ignorant, because we are confused, and because we still have something to learn. We are still thinking of ourselves as bodies, something small, individual, incomplete. We feel we need to get something, to do something. We feel we are separated and need to be whole. This is painful, so we suffer. But perhaps there is a reason for it all. Perhaps the individual soul or *jiva* learns through suffering and begins to really search for a way out. Or perhaps we should say he searches and turns inward, for it is only from within that the real answers come. Suffering itself may be the teacher that wakes us up, makes us struggle to be free. A sage said, 'Compassion is the foundation of earnestness. Compassion for yourselves and others, born of suffering, your own and others.'<sup>13</sup> And remember, we are not alone. There are great souls like Swami Vivekananda who, out of compassion, have vowed to be born again and again to help mankind reach freedom.

We come here to learn, to be free. According to Advaita philosophy there is only reality in the universe, which it calls Brahman; everything else is unreal, manifested and manufactured out Brahman by the power of maya. To reach back to that Brahman is our goal. Even suffering may lead us to that goal. Through spiritual disciplines, voluntary self-sacrifice and complete self-abnegation the soul can become pure and perfect, free from suffering it-

self. The *Bhagavadgita* calls this state 'the end of sorrow.'<sup>14</sup> This is the goal we are all seeking.

Let me end with a prayer. A swami told me when he first heard this it changed his whole life.

*Ko nu syādupāyo' tra  
yenāham sarvadehinām.  
Antaḥ praviśya satatam  
bhaveyam duḥkhabhārahāk.*

O Lord, is there any way by which I can enter into the heart of every being and carry the burden of their suffering all the time? Is there any way?<sup>15</sup> \*

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7. Brother Lawrence, *Practice of the Presence of God*.
8. Bible, Psalm 23.
9. CW, 4.496.
10. *St Theresa*, pp. 52-65.
11. CW, 1.442.
12. *ibid.*, 1.76.
13. Nisargadatta Maharaj, *I am That*, trans. Maurice Frydman (Bombay: Chetana, 1976), vol. 2, p. 196.
14. *Bhagavadgita*, 6.23.
15. Quote from a letter of Swami Chetananda.

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I am responsible for my fate, I am the bringer of good unto myself, I am the bringer of evil. I am the Pure and Blessed One. We must reject all thoughts that assert to the contrary.

—Swami Vivekananda, CW, 2.202

# Science and Spirituality

DR HARI GAUTAM

I am indeed grateful for having been invited to deliver the 64th Foundation Day oration of the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture—an institution established on 29 January 1938 to commemorate the birth centenary of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. The Institute of Culture, a branch of the Ramakrishna Mission—having 192 centres and sub centres in India and abroad—is dedicated to propagating the teachings Sri Ramakrishna and his able disciple Swami Vivekananda; the core of India's oldest philosophy, Indian culture and Vedanta; the study of other cultures and civilizations to ensure an all-round development of mankind; the equal validity of all religions, the potential divinity of man and service to man as a way of worshipping God.

On this solemn occasion, I bow with reverence to Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, and with utmost respect and humility pay tributes to the enormous commitment and dedication of the distinguished swamis of the Ramakrishna Order, who have ceaselessly contributed to transforming our society and sustaining an order of mankind with Indian values and culture.

For me it is a very special day in my life to stand before you in this historic Vivekananda Hall of the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture. I am quite aware that I am intellectually ill equipped, inadequate in the required knowledge and spirit, and unequal to the task of delivering such a coveted, high-profile and most esteemed oration. Nevertheless, I consider it my privilege to have been chosen for this honour and request His Excellency the Governor, revered swamis and the audience not to measure me with those tall and eminent stalwarts who have earlier delivered this oration.

The subject of science and spiritual-

ity—though important, interesting and intricate—is thought-provoking and not an easy one to dwell upon particularly in the context of what today's scientists define as science, and their apathy towards the spirituality they refuse to understand. What is science? Is spirituality a science? Is there what we call western science in contrast with the Indian one? Can we achieve a synthesis of western science and spirituality? What approach do we propose to follow and how relevant should be our education? These are some important issues that need to be examined and worked upon. In this oration I may have borrowed at places certain phrases, statements and versions from the writings of great and eminent men, which I gratefully acknowledge.

This address has given me a unique privilege to vent my feelings, more so as a medical scientist, on the sensitive subject of science and spirituality, which might be a criticism, suggestion or recommendation. My observations are my own personal thoughts and in no way represent any official view in this context.

Since the dawn of civilization human beings have made tremendous efforts to mitigate suffering through various ways, including the use of science and technology. But we cannot call it progress in the real sense of the term. Have science and technology taught us love, sympathy and humility? Certainly not. We do not want nuclear bombs. We require food, shelter and clothing for everyone. We do not need hatred and racial discrimination but love, sympathy and universal brotherhood of mankind.

Science has become a dominant way of exploring the world not only because of its logical and empirical nature but also because science and technology have established the West as the supreme colonizer. Science has be-

come the language of the victors who have suppressed not only the industry but also the spiritual languages of India and other cultures.

It is true that Western science, because of its immense material resources, has come to dominate the world. One needs billions of dollars nowadays for research. India doesn't have them, nor can it remunerate honourably its scientists and engineers. Hence many of our top scientists have exported themselves to the West. But it may also be true that Western science, however brilliant, is like a blind man, because it dissociated itself from the Spirit as early as the 17th century.

Today's science is rudderless, driven by technology and is not clear about human goals. It therefore conduces to greed and violence. This is mainly because humanity has lost religion. Science is partly responsible for the decline of religion as well. Our scientific power has outrun our spiritual power. We have guided missiles and misguided men. Spiritual power is exogenous to scientific power. But the reality is the other way round. Our spiritual superstructure is solidly founded on scientific substructure.

Science becomes dangerous only when it imagines that it has reached its goal. That science and the scientific outlook have taken mankind forwards in the last one hundred and odd years is the tall claim scientists make. Anyone who questions the above rhetoric is dubbed superstitious or downright illogical, in addition to being unscientific.

Science, if anything, has taken mankind backwards pushing man to the brink of self-destruction. Is not the threat of nuclear war from the terrorists based on scientific data? Is not the anthrax fever in the USA born out of complicated scientific research to get resistant germs to fight wars? Is not the ever-present threat of chemical warfare based on science?

Like any other human activity, science has its limitations. It would be foolhardy to believe that science is the be all and end all of human wisdom. What we know is probably a

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very small fraction of what is to be known. Only he who understands science very well realizes the depth of his ignorance. Positive sciences, at best, could answer questions like 'how' or 'how much'. They will never be able to say 'why'.

Rational thinking and scientific outlook have enormous limitations. When you look beyond reason you get an insight into nature's functioning better. Nature has its reasons always, but reason cannot explore them many a time. How else can one feel love, hatred, jealousy and the like? None of them can be measured in scientific terms. One could experience love but cannot see love and measure its dimensions. If science is measurement and measurement is science as defined by Marie Curie, love as an emotion does not exist at all. No one has seen the wind but when trees dance and bend, it can be felt. Similarly there are many things that can only be felt but not seen and measured. The problem with mankind today is intolerance of other's views.

Recently, when doctors went on strike in Israel the death rate and morbidity fell significantly there—only to bounce back to the original levels when there was peace between the striking doctors and the government. This was very interesting as the gathered scientific evidence did not have any linear relationship to what must have happened inside the human body. The human body is run by the human mind, which is scientifically unfathomable. There are so many imponderables in nature

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that one cannot answer all the questions with the help of science alone. There are many things outside the realm of science which are beyond its explanatory capacity.

Years ago Leonard Leibovici showed that remote, retroactive, intercessory prayer could do wonders for patient recovery in hospitals. A positivist that he was, he went a step further to urge doctors to include prayer in their armamentarium. The prayer theme was taken to great scientific heights by a recent study in an American university hospital in a well-controlled, randomized, triple-blind (the patient, his treating doctor and the relatives were kept in the dark) prospective study of heart attack patients. The prayed-for group recorded a very significant fall in all parameters of the illness in a coronary care set-up. Even the death rate was significantly lower in the prayed-for group. This was replicated in patients who had severe infective fevers, in another milestone study.

These episodes are only examples of the many paranormal phenomena that one observes in day-to-day medical practice, which cannot as yet be explained by modern science. Albert Einstein wrote during his last days: 'I do not believe that this world is a wonder; I think it is a wonderful wonder.'

Among all nations—during the course of centuries and throughout the passage of time—India was known as a mine of wisdom and the fountainhead of justice and good government. And Indians were credited with ex-

cellent intellect, exalted ideas, universal maxims, rare inventions and wonderful talents.

Western science could not develop as a science of values. Throughout its long history, India, on the other hand, has fostered understanding and tolerance—with respect to both physical sciences, and intra-religious and inter-religious relations. India did not create and uphold the whole host of those conflicts that have plagued the West: faith against reason, religion against religion, religion against science, mind against matter, and the natural against the supernatural.

One dogma that is stifling the spirit of modern physical science and seriously distorting the human psyche and the social situation—in this otherwise amazing modern space age—is materialism and its reductionist approach while dealing with inconvenient facts of human experience. Distinguished scientists themselves have protested and warned against this dogma.

Experience is the only source of knowledge. In the world, religion is the only science where there is no surety, because it is not taught as a science of empirical experience. Religion deals with the truths of the metaphysical world, just as chemistry and the other natural sciences deal with the truths of the physical world. The book one must read to learn chemistry is the book of nature. The book from which to learn religion is your own mind and heart. The sage is often ignorant of physical science because he reads the wrong book: the book within. And the scientist is too often ignorant of religion, because he too reads the wrong book: the book without.

Religion has to be reinvented as spirituality to suit the contemporary mind. It has to be scientific, modern, rational, universal and common to the whole of mankind.

Unfortunately, Indian science today is very westernized because the scientific knowledge taught in the universities lacks a connection with the spiritual and our golden past. It never mentions India's ancient tradition of scientific inquiry. Major discoveries in

Indian science such as the positions of stars, the calculation of solar eclipses or the concept of zero were made at the time when there were no instruments. Egyptians built their pyramids by means of Indian arithmetic. Eighteenth century French astronomers were using Hindu calculations for the positions of stars and solar eclipses. A genius like Ramanujan was able to devise stupendous mathematical theorems without sophisticated means. Modern scientific and technological accomplishments find mention in our ancient texts, which at one time seemed figments of imagination and storytelling.

Buddha was able to say long before Einstein that everything in our universe is constituted of atoms, constantly changing, dying and being reborn at each moment. 'Know thy mind, know thy self.' If you know your own mind, you can fathom all other minds; if you know one particle of the world, you know all the particles of the world. This is the truth India has been preaching and practising for millenniums. It was because there was always in India a profound and everlasting quest for the Spirit. Unfortunately, this has not been well appreciated by many of our scientists with a western bent of mind.

Modern science has given man intellectual energy and the command of immense physical energy resources. Both these energies are unfortunately digesting him and making him alienated, frustrated, bored, anxious, tense and cynical, since he is ignorant of how to control the horse of his mind. His horse ride has turned into the tragedy of the horse's enjoying the ride and his becoming a helpless victim of that ride.

India today is a pale shadow of what she should have been. Instead of leading the world in life-nurturing ideas, she is being led by materialistic forces. Her economy should have reflected the care and culture of her people; instead it has been dehumanized by neo-materialism. She should have recreated and strengthened her tradition of upholding unity in diversity. Instead, the country has

Science should realize that it can only deal with the means. But means have to be subservient to ends. And ends can only be discovered by philosophy and spirituality.

been torn by conflict and confusion.

The world is in the midst of moral chaos. With all the material means of pleasure, people in affluent societies are unhappy and there is no peace of mind. Family bonds are breaking, and under the pressures of modern living, people feel that they are chasing a mirage.

In spite of our strength and unshakable cultural heritage, the winds of change have ripped our society and changed it into one with conflicts, artificiality and paradoxes. The paradox of our time in history is that we have bigger buildings but smaller temples; wider freeways but narrower viewpoints. We spend more but have less; we buy more but enjoy it less. We have bigger houses and smaller families; more conveniences but less time. We have more degrees but less sense; more knowledge but less judgement; more experts but less solutions; more medicine but less wellness. We have multiplied our possessions, but reduced our values. We talk too much, love too seldom, and hate too. We have added years to life, not life to years. We've been all the way to the moon and back, but have trouble crossing the street to meet the new neighbour. We have conquered outer space but not inner space; we've split the atom but not our prejudice. We have higher incomes but lower morals; we have become long on quantity but short on quality. These are the times of tall men and short character; steep profits and shallow relationships. These are the times of world peace but domestic warfare; more leisure but less fun; more kinds of food but less nutrition. These are days of two incomes but more divorce; of fancier houses but broken homes. It is a time when there is much in the show window and nothing in the stock-room.



This is the tragic state of man in an otherwise amazing, modern scientific civilization. A turning of human interest and seeking in the spiritual direction alone can save modern civilization. This alone will help modern man to handle and enjoy the world and its delights as a free person, as a master, instead of remaining its helpless victim. This is the eternal message of the science of spirituality.

Here is the same India whose soil has been trodden by the feet of the greatest sages that ever lived. Here first arose the doctrines of the immortality of the soul, the existence of an all-merciful God, a God immanent in nature and man. We are the children of such a country.

The greatest challenge the world is facing today is the crisis of confidence and character, mental and moral decay and the breakdown of traditional discipline. If any nation attempts to throw off its national vitality, that nation dies. In India, religious life forms the centre. But other than occasional lip service, nothing has been done to construct the nation from within. The decision-makers paid no heed to Swami Vivekananda's sane advice that for India to become great, we must have the union of hearts which beat to the same spiritual tune.

Religion and religion alone is the life of India, and when that goes, India will die. Religion is essentially a science of being and becoming, something that concerns man's inner nature. In this land religion and spirituality are still the fountains which will have to overflow and flood the world, to bring in new life and new vitality. That is the one great truth India has to teach to the world. This is spirituality—the science of the Soul.

We are at the crossroads of destiny; we must take the road that leads to complementarity of destiny; we must take the road that leads to complementarity, not competition; harmony, not discord; and holism, not hedonism.

The world today needs to practise spirituality. A peep into history provides glaring examples of how the most horrible and shock-

ing crimes were committed against humanity by men of outstandingly sharp intellect and wide knowledge. But for want of spiritual strength, they could not take on the beast within. Spirituality frees the mind from tension and can lead to the creation of a strife-free world.

Being an inner search, the science of spirituality is the science of meaning and value. Values do not derive from physical nature studied by the physical sciences and machines fabricated by its technology. They derive from the depth of the human spirit. If values are not mechanical and, consequently, do not derive from external physical nature, they must be spiritual and must be sought for in the depth of human nature itself.

'You see many stars in the sky at night, but not when the sun rises. Can you therefore say that there are no stars in the heaven during the day? O man, because you cannot find God in the days of your ignorance, say not there is no God,' says Sri Ramakrishna.

The aim of the science of spirituality is to lead man from wretchedness to blessedness, from creatureliness and helplessness to freedom and fearlessness. Nobel laureate physicist Brian Josephson has stated that, in order to go beyond quantum mechanics, scientists will have to meditate and experience the deeper realities already known to mystics.

We live in a shrinking world in which the malign heritage of conflict and competition and the growing gap between the developed and the developing world will have to make way for a new culture of convergence and co-operation. Science should be a part of a larger philosophy. Scientific truths should no longer be opposed to spiritual truths. Science should realize that it can only deal with the means. But means have to be subservient to ends. And ends can only be discovered by philosophy and spirituality.

Science can solve the ultimate mystery of the universe, so many scientists believe, despite the paradoxes of quantum behaviour staring at them. Spiritualists believe that they

solved that mystery long ago despite their inability to explain it and connect it with the physical world. Obviously a synthesis of science and spirituality, though having been attempted half-heartedly many a time, is now overdue.

Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, the so-called father of Indian nationalism, looked forward to the fusion of European science with Indian spirituality way back in the 19th century as he recognized that, although highly developed in the material aspects of culture, the modern West had not developed the spiritual aspects, while Indian spirituality was more advanced.

As there is no conflict between knowledge and wisdom, India sees no conflict between physical sciences and the science of spirituality. With this impressive and inspiring thought, background and experience, scientists and intellectuals in India should be doing their historically conditioned service to humanity in India and abroad by living and disseminating this synoptic vision of the unity and harmony of the physical sciences and the science of spirituality. All *vidyas*, as much secular as sacred, are presided over, according to Indian tradition, by one and the same goddess, Sarasvati.

The spiritual dimension will have to be once again given importance in our new educational thinking. The principal goal of education is to create men who are capable of doing new things, not simply of repeating what other generations have done—people who are creative and inventive. The whole purpose of education is to turn mirrors into windows. Education has to aim at not only imparting relevant skills, but also at inculcating a sense of responsibility, dedication, patriotism, character and moral values.

Dr Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan said that three things—vital dynamism, intellectual efficiency and spiritual direction—together constitute the proper aim of education. Moral and spiritual training is an essential part of educa-

tion. Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore had a vision of such an education: education must aim at the development of moral, spiritual and ethical values and we should seek them in our own heritage as well as in other cultures and civilizations. It is high time that the discovery of the Soul became the glory of education. From the primary to the university stage, our educational system should impart spiritual techniques.

We wish we had taught our children Indian wisdom, though it may not be acceptable to some intellectuals who do not want anything Indian in this country.

Indians ought to shake off the inferiority complex developed under colonialism and their western bent of mind, which denigrates India's indigenous knowledge system and copies the West in accepting only certain methods of study as true systems of knowledge. If India is to show the world the validity of its knowledge systems, it has to speak in the language of modern discourse which is imbued with scientific knowledge. It should be able to convince the scientifically educated that this knowledge is based on evidence and reason.

Changing times demand a new concept, an innovative approach to reform and update our educational system and to create institutions with more meaningful contact with society at large. The real question is not whether education will be transformed. The question is rather *how* and *by whom*. We need a leader in education. Swami Vivekananda said that with a hundred motivated young men he would reform the whole society. Today, it may not be difficult to find a hundred motivated men but it is very difficult to find a Swami Vivekananda.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am immensely grateful to you for your patient hearing and feel deeply honoured to have been given this unique opportunity to deliver this prestigious oration. Thank you. \*

# Self-identity Crisis

SWAMI TATTWAVIDANANDA

A gentleman is leafing through his family photo album. After some moments of delight followed by some of pain, he gently closes the album. His countenance assumes an abstracted look while reminiscences fill him. When he is partially out of the reverie, his eyes happen to fall on a nearby mirror that has caught his reflection. Focusing on his features he ponders, 'How much I have changed.' The gentleman is hardly aware that behind this thought—like any other thought—flashes simultaneously the subjective idea of identity. This is why none ever doubts himself or herself. '*Na hi jātu kaścid atra sandigdhe ahaṁ vā nāhaṁ vā iti*, no one doubts whether he is or is not.'<sup>1</sup> This idea of identity is very immediate, is a fact, hence is never questioned. And on this depend all experiences of life, both internal and external. And on this obviously is the great search of philosophy, psychology and a host of other disciplines.

Having got into a philosophic frame of mind, the gentleman closes his eyes in introspection, trying to feel the source of this idea of identity. The only thing he comes up with, even after a lot of effort, is a general awareness of himself as constituted of a body. Partially opening his eyes he casts a glance at his body, for all purposes his self. But the body is nothing but a product of genetic factors and evolution. It is subject not only to genetic laws but also to the physical laws that govern matter. Shutting his eyes once more he notices various thoughts flitting in his mind, all rooted in and revolving round his identity, his 'I'. He reflects, 'I am Devadatta'. The identification of the name with his body is fast and it is as old as his memory can go. As a matter of course then, he continues: 'I am fat, bald, short'—all pertaining to his physical configuration. After a pause he then adds his incidental distinguish-

ing features, 'I am an Indian, a brahmin, a chemical engineer, an executive ...'. All this means much to him, for these have become part of his self, his identity. This identity is significant to social philosophers, for they urge that the 'self' is constructed by social processes and interactions. So Devadatta's 'self' is dependent on many factors and is specific culturally, historically, economically, even politically. Is there then no determined nature, no essence of Devadatta? Is he only a product of genetic factors, and is a social construct—both of which are subject to constant flux?

As Devadatta's philosophic mood persists, he tries to reflect on his essence, the identity which must be trans-social and trans-genetic. What he feels and means when he says 'I' are different from what someone else, say Yajnadatta, feels and means by Devadatta's 'I'. That is because to Yajnadatta, Devadatta is an object. Apart from this, in his busy world Devadatta himself is not totally aware of his identity, its full implications, even when he uses the personal pronoun, except perhaps when he is emotionally excited. Its use has become automatic, almost casual. One thing he is sure of is that though he feels he is just the body, there is still an indubitable experience of stability—a subjective anchor, an unchanging something which stands all genetic and social changes.

Somehow or other we have got a conviction that there is a reality underlying the phenomenal world.... There is also in us an irrepressible urge to know the reality beyond the sensible phenomena. But there can be no knowledge of anything unless we have some experience of it. To know a thing is to understand how we experience it, and to understand our experience is to know what other experiences are implied by it. If this be so, then the desire to know reality as against appearances must be based on some primary experience of it.<sup>2</sup>

Devadatta is a product of the modern educational system and knows something about the brain and its functions. He tries to visualize the grey matter inside his skull, crisscrossing a billion times with billions of nerves, with its neurons actively firing chemical messages over synapses with the help of neurotransmitters. Somewhere in this bewildering neuro-psychological or neuro-biological mechanism—with its centres of language, reasoning, perceptions, emotions, memory banks and instincts—a distinct personality is created. As he is reflecting on the identity that seethes in the chemical and electrical soup, he is a bit pleased at being interrupted by a thought that his being a chemical engineer has made understanding things easy for him. As he is congratulating himself, it suddenly strikes him that this 'self', this identity of his,

thing subject to change. Are there subjective and objective sides to the ego? Physical matter is something out of which everything is composed. Yet matter is configured individually in particular bodies. Is the ego also something like that—particular yet general? So this possible another aspect of the ego needs to be investigated. Secondly, I (Devadatta) am not conscious of my brain but my ego.

In this line of Devadatta's logic, another would argue with equal emphasis, about who is the knower of this ego. In Sanskrit it is referred to as the *jñātā aham*, the 'knower I', which cognizes the *jñeya aham*, the 'known I'. If in order to know the *jñeya aham*, there is a *jñātā aham*, then the first *jñātā aham* would require another *jñātā aham* to know it and so on. This will lead to infinite regress, *anavasthā doṣa*. Devadatta's first foray into understand-

## By closing his eyes to further inquiry Devadatta has metaphorically joined Virocana's ranks.

would not properly be trans-genetic. Faced with this ambiguity he recalls philosophers and psychologists saying that there is an ego, the essential self, which is a constant conscious principle in a person, which knows and consolidates all empirical experiences. Theories regarding the dualism of mind and body are lost to him but modern ideas grip his thinking, which say that the workings of the brain give rise to the semblance of an entity called mind/psyche/ego or the 'I'.

This has thrown our philosophical Devadatta into a philosophical quandary. Is the identity created in and by the brain presented to the ego or the mind? Or is it just a matter of using different terms to mean the same thing? He has no doubt that the Devadatta who was a thin small boy is the same who is now portly and middle-aged. How and where has this idea of identity persisted? Not in the body, including the brain, for it has changed considerably.

If the ego is a product, or dependent on neural mechanisms, then it should be some-

ing himself was met by the revelation of his own colossal ignorance. His loud thought 'who and what am I?' falls softly into obscure silence.

Now that discursive thought has failed him, Devadatta tries and uses picture forms in his search. He is met only with a series of Devadattas in his mental space. He is an unchanging conscious subject while thoughts and actions like eating, growing, studying and working flow before him like a sequence. Says Swami Vivekananda:

... the argument of self-identity—'I am I'—that the I of yesterday is the I of today, and that the I of today will be the I of tomorrow, that in spite of all the changes that are happening to the body, I yet believe that I am the same I. ... This, though apparently very convincing and clear, is based upon the mere play on words. The 'I' and the doing, going and dreaming may be separate in black and white, but no one can separate them in his mind. When I eat, I think of myself as eating—I am identified with eating. When I run, I and the running are not two separate things. Thus the argument from personal iden-

tity does not seem to be very strong. The other argument from memory is also weak. If the identity of my being is represented by my memory, many things which I have forgotten are lost from that identity.<sup>3</sup>

Devadatta gives out a loud sigh and sinks deeper into the sofa, thinking that these problems are meant for philosophers, not for him. I, Devadatta, am happy and successful—he has now identified himself with happiness and success.

He reaches for the nearby remote control and turns the television on, trying to cut himself off from all confusing thoughts about personal identity. This reminds us of a story in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*.<sup>4</sup> Indra, the king of the gods and Virocana, the king of the demons, unknown to each other, approach their father Prajāpati to know about the Atman. Both of them misunderstand the mystical teaching behind ‘The Person that is seen in the eye is this

the set, and sees the pictures disappear into the flat dark screen. He ponders, ‘Is a person’s identity too switched off likewise at death?’ Devadatta is left with these interrogation marks floating across his head. It is not his fault, for sensory knowledge cannot plumb into these deeper realms. He commenced his inquiry all right, but he was circumscribed by the constraints of ordinary human ignorance. If only he had taken some time to go through the philosophical books of his father, a Vedantist!

The waking state of living beings is dominated by the ego or ‘I’. This consciousness is withdrawn in deep sleep. Apart from sleep, this phenomena of withdrawal is also seen consequent to any serious injury to the body, a blow to the head, swoon, effects of narcotics, emotional shock or anaesthesia. In contrast, there is trance brought about by *prāṇāyāma* and deep spiritual moods, besides samadhi. In

## Every microscopic organic cell has intelligence and self-consciousness in a rudimentary form. This is also corroborated by modern science, according to which the cell is endowed with a distinct individuality.

Atman.’ Virocana goes away and on his return, tells his fellow demons that according to their father the body is the Atman; so tend your body and keep it trim. Indra too leaves, but on his way back has misgivings about the teaching and returns for clarification. Twice more he receives further instruction, misunderstands and returns. But each time he understands deeper aspects of the Atman. On the fourth visit he finally realizes the Atman, the immortal and fearless Reality. By closing his eyes to further inquiry Devadatta has metaphorically joined Virocana’s ranks.

However, Devadatta’s attention has not glued itself to the television either. It is assailed by intermittent disquieting thoughts about his deceased parents, whose photographs he has just seen. What has happened to them? After a while he becomes aware of the remote control still in his palm, switches off

these cases, all trace of identity is wiped out temporarily, only to re-emerge later. Of course the merger of identity in trance and samadhi cannot be categorized with the rest, as those who have experienced it say that they had opened themselves to higher states of consciousness in which new knowledge was acquired. We will not go into this as it is a different subject matter. Consciousness can and is measured according to the levels of alertness that is correlated with electrical activity (like alpha waves and delta waves) observable with the help of an electroencephalogram (EEG). But even during diminished workings of the brain, a trace of identity is felt. This is true even in hypnotized subjects and persons who are dreaming. If consciousness were the property of the brain, why should it lose or let it diminish at times? This, in spite of the brain working continuously to keep the organism



alive. The brain being physical matter, its derivative—the mind or psyche—has also to be matter, for like produces like. We generally look at it from this angle. But people believing in reincarnation say that the mind produces the body. The first view is called materialistic, and the proponents of this view were called Cārvākas in India. Swami Vivekananda observes:

Modern physiology at every step has identified mind with the brain. But we in India have known that always. That is the first proposition that the Hindu boy learns, that the mind is matter, only finer, the body is gross.<sup>5</sup>

The ancient Sāṅkhya philosophy in its cosmology states that *prakṛti*, nature in its undifferentiated state, first evolves into *mahat*, universal intelligence, then to *asmitā*, universal self-consciousness, the universal 'I'. This in

*garbha*, the cosmic person) in place of *mahat*, universal intelligence, to complete the picture, against the self-evolving *prakṛti*. And in place of *asmitā*, Vedanta brings in God's 'I shall become many, I shall be born....'<sup>7</sup> What Devadatta thinks as *his* 'I am', *asmi/aham*, is but an infinitesimal individualized reflection of God's 'I', which has covered and interpenetrated everything. Sri Ramakrishna says,

Try to seek this 'I'. Is this 'I' the bones or flesh or intestines? Seeking the 'I' you discover 'Thou'. In other words, nothing exists inside you but the power of God. There is no 'I' but only He.<sup>8</sup>

This is not the end, however. There is something more that Advaita Vedanta posits: the Absolute, the infinite existence called Brahman. This 'I', though of cosmic proportion and belonging to God, is yet conditioned

**Each identity then, is conjured up by *avidya* which brings in its train desires and karma. ... Yet, this very Devadatta's identity when purified through *vidya* ... becomes a doorway to the highest realms of existence.**

turn evolves into all matter, gross and subtle, including the sensory and nervous systems—in fact everything. Sāṅkhyans also posit *sat-kāryavāda*, the doctrine that the cause is always present in, and modified into, the effect. This means that right down to the simple organic cell is present intelligence and self-consciousness, the 'I-sense'. In other words, every microscopic organic cell has intelligence and self-consciousness in a rudimentary form. This is also corroborated by modern science, according to which the cell is endowed with a distinct individuality. Thus intelligence and self-consciousness pervade not only the whole body—which is nothing but a conglomeration of cells—of an individual, but all bodies, from gods to demigods, humans, animals, reptiles, insects to simple-celled life forms, in fact down to a blade of grass.

Advaita Vedanta, however, not going fully with Sāṅkhya,<sup>6</sup> brings in God (*hiraṇya-*

by name and form, and is relative. And what makes this cosmic self-consciousness individualized into that of Devadatta and the rest of creation? We will come to this presently.

Giving a psychological explanation of identity, Vedanta states that the *antaḥkaraṇa* (the inner instrument) is a part of the subtle body, and is called *manas*, *buddhi*, *ahaṅkāra* and *citta* according to its different functions.<sup>9</sup> The mind is called the *manas*, the *citta* is *vṛtti* or vibrating, the unsettled state. If you throw a stone in a lake, first there will be vibration, and then resistance. For a moment the water will vibrate and then it will react on the stone. So when any impression comes on the *citta*, it first vibrates a little. That is called the *manas*. The mind carries the impression farther in, and presents it to the *buddhi*, the determinative faculty, which reacts. Behind the *buddhi* is *ahaṅkāra*, egoism (the *asmitā* seen earlier), the self-consciousness which says, 'I am.' Behind

*ahaikāra* is *mahat*, intelligence, the highest form of nature's existence. Each one is the effect of the succeeding one. In the case of the lake, every blow that comes to it is from the external world, while in the case of the mind, the blow may come either from the external or from the internal world. Behind the intelligence is the Self of man, the *Puruṣa*, the Atman, the pure, the perfect, who alone is the seer, and for whom is all this change. In the words of Swami Vivekananda,

Man looks on all these changes; he himself is never impure; but through what the Vedantists call *adhyāsa*, by reflection, by implication, he seems to be impure.<sup>10</sup>

*Adhyāsa*, the superimposition Swami Vivekananda refers to, is an important concept in Advaita Vedānta.<sup>11</sup> Let us see what this superimposition is. When a picture, say *x*, is superimposed on a larger picture, say *y*, a third picture—a combination of the two—*xy* seems to materialize. Similarly, when *prakṛti*, conditioned existence (nature), is apparently superimposed upon Brahman, the Absolute Existence-Consciousness-Bliss, a third different entity arises, known as the individual self. Advaita Vedānta says, this superimposition is due to the incomprehensible *avidyā*, non-knowledge, nescience or ignorance. This makes the one Reality appear as many. This one Reality, however, shines through the many as the content of the concept 'I'.<sup>12</sup> In the words of Śaṅkarācārya,

this infinite Atman/Brahman—which is devoid of the ideas of cause and effect, which is the Reality beyond all imaginations, homogeneous, matchless, beyond the range of proofs, established by the pronouncements of the Vedas—is ever familiar to us as the sense of 'I'.<sup>13</sup>

Each identity then, is conjured up by *avidyā* which brings in its train desires and karma—*avidyā-kāma-karma*. This complex chain of cause and effect, this bondage, is what constitutes Devadatta's identity of genetic and social factors. For on karma depends to whom, where and how we are born. Yet, this very Devadatta's identity, when purified

through *vidyā*, knowledge, becomes a doorway to the highest realms of existence. But this is more easily said than done. How this limited identity deludes us is best summed up by Sri Ramakrishna. One day at Dakshineswar, an old indigent man who had received permission from the authorities to cut and carry away grass for free was hard at his task. His avarice had made him cut so much as to be unable to lift the bundled load onto his head. The poor man refused to acknowledge it, and repeatedly tried and failed. While looking at this comical scene Sri Ramakrishna was inspired with spiritual emotion and thought, 'Ah! The Atman, the knowledge infinite, abides within, and yet so much foolishness and ignorance without!' Then he exclaimed, 'O Rama, inscrutable is Thy play!' and went into ecstasy.<sup>14</sup> \*

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11. For a full treatment on the subject see Śaṅkarācārya's 'Adhyāsa-bhāṣya' on the *Brahma Sūtras*.
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13. *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, 409.
14. See Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master*, trans. Swami Jagadananda (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1978), vol. 1, p. 301.

# RELIGION AND LIFE

## Swami Bhuteshanandaji's Answers to Questions

*How to know that God is both immanent as well as transcendent?*

If He is all-pervading, He is both within and without. See *ākāśa*, space: it is both within and without. The ether of the science of yester-years, for instance, is all-pervasive. Now, this *ākāśa* is where you are. Where there is an object, there is *ākāśa* within and without. All these are relative concepts.

*What is the difference between a siddha and an avatara?*

The siddha, or a perfected being, attains perfection through sadhana. The avatara, however, is born perfect. The perfected being had to overcome maya, but the avatara is never bound by it, though He may use it for his purposes.

*Maharaj, fear arises in the mind often. What shall I do?*

Think and understand that fear is baseless. And if there is something you can do to overcome fear, do that. Once, accompanied by a monk, I was going along a lonely Himalayan path towards Gangotri. On the way to Gangotri, there is a halting place, a hut, called Dhanoti. We were going from Dhanoti to another hut called Kotli. If we did not reach Kotli on time, we would not be able to get a place of stay. So my companion went away as fast as he could. I was walking alone on that Himalayan path. It was evening. I had walked some nine miles from the first hut and had to walk much more to reach the next. I realized that night would soon descend in the wilderness. I could neither return to the place from which I had started, nor was I close to the next one. Suddenly fear gripped me. My body was getting heated up because of fear, and I began to sweat profusely. The darkness of the Himala-

yas of those days is something which is beyond description: you don't know whether your eyes are shut or open. So when I thought that it would soon be dark, I became terrified. How would I proceed? The jungle was known to be frequented by many wild animals. The path was so steep that a small slip would mean falling into the abyss. My mouth dried up and I began to shiver. I realized that slowly I was becoming panicky. I felt so helpless. In such a state, after a few moments my instincts began to recover. I told my mind that it wouldn't help to be afraid. That would be counterproductive. I had a stick in my hand. I struck the stick on the road in front of me noisily and stood firmly. When I stood firmly thus, all my fear was gone. I held the stick firmly and controlled my mind. When once I told my mind to be calm, it became calm, resigning itself to whatever was to happen. I began to walk slowly, with firm steps, towards the Kotli hut. While I was walking thus, it became totally dark. Because of the peaks around, even the little light of the sun that should fall on the ground did not. So the stick became my only refuge. I would test the area in front of me to see if it was really ground or gorge, and put my step forward. Thus, I managed to cover several miles to reach the hut by early next morning! On the way, one more thing happened. Just as I was walking slowly, something huge crossed the path in front of me and ran down. It was a big bear.

Listen to a story. A little prince is sleeping in his mother's arms in the palace. He is weeping in sleep. Why? Because he sees in a dream that he is walking in a forest, and a tiger is about to attack him. So he has become scared and is weeping for fear. His mother shakes him up and awakes him. When his eyes open, the little prince gapes in wonder: where have

the forest and the tiger gone? He is safe in his mother's protective arms. He becomes free from fear.

We too are princes. The Divine Mother is protecting us always, and we too are in the Mother's arms, completely safe. What should we fear? If we think thus, we will be rid of fear.

*How to overcome attachment, despair and sadness?*

Attachment (*āśakti*) is in your mind. You must convince your mind—there is no better way. Everyone's mind has such weaknesses and we must struggle to shrug them off. *Uddharedātmanātmānam nātmānamavasādayet*. You yourself are responsible for your good. There is no point in thinking that you are weak. You should uplift yourself with the help of discrimination (*viveka*). The strength to achieve this is in you; all strength is within you. If you think of God constantly, His strength will manifest in you.

*What is sin?*

That which keeps us away from purity is sin.

*What is a good action? What is a bad action? And which is our natural action?*

That which brings good is good action; that which harms is bad; and that which brings neither good nor bad is natural action.

*Maharaj, what am I to do when colleagues in the office taunt me, criticize me, and try to harm me?*

Bear all that silently. Avoid them as far as possible.

*When they insult me?*

Do what Swamiji did in such a situation. While he was sailing to America, two Christian missionaries went on criticizing and insulting Swamiji. Swamiji tolerated them for a while. When he could not anymore, he roared

like a lion: 'You see, one more word, and I shall throw both of you overboard.' Seeing Swamiji's personality, the missionaries must have understood that Swamiji meant what he said. So they kept quiet after that. Sri Ramakrishna has said that you must hiss. But hissing may cost you a fortune.

*What shall I do then?*

Quit the spot, not the job.

*The behaviour of some people is not to my liking. What shall I do?*

Please beware of your own conduct; be alert. If you are sincere to yourself, work with alertness and dedication, you will not be disturbed by others' shortcomings.

*We have work to do, don't we, Maharaj?*

You have to exhaust your karma. By karma, duties are meant.

*Maharaj, how to know if my karmas have exhausted?*

Where is the necessity to know? When the idea 'I am the doer' vanishes, you will understand that you have exhausted your karma.

*Maharaj, God is ever present within us. But why does he not forewarn us before we commit evil deeds?*

He does forewarn you! The problem is, you do not listen to His warnings. Those who are calm by nature, understand His words spoken in signs. Parents warn their children so much, but how many listen? Do all children obey their parents?

Be calm. Keep your mind tranquil and pure. Only then can you do the right thing at the right time. Only then will His signs be intelligible to you.

*(concluded)*

—Compiled by Smt Manju Nandi Mazumdar

# Avadhūta Upaniṣad

TRANSLATED BY SWAMI ATMAPRIYANANDA

State or condition of an *avadhūta*

प्रियादिवृत्तेः पक्षित्वेन वर्णनम्

तस्य प्रियं शिरः कृत्वा मोदो दक्षिणपक्षकः ।

प्रमोद उत्तरः पक्ष आनन्दो गोष्पदायते ॥४॥

4. His joy (*priya*) is [to be envisaged as] the head; delight (*moda*) the right wing [as in the case of a bird]; great [ecstatic] delight (*pramoda*) the left wing; and bliss (*ānanda*) [the very Self]; he [thus] assumes a fourfold condition, like the [four] feet of a cow.<sup>1</sup>

गोवालसदृशं शीर्षे नापि मध्ये न चाप्यधः ।

ब्रह्म पुच्छं प्रतिष्ठेति पुच्छाकारेण कारयेत् ।

एवं चतुष्पदं कृत्वा ते यान्ति परमां गतिम् ॥५॥

5. Brahman, which is similar to the tail of a cow,<sup>2</sup> is not [to be envisaged] as either the head, or the middle portion, or the bottom portion. But It (Brahman) is [to be envisaged as what remains, that is as] the tail, [on account of the Upaniṣadic statement] that 'Brahman is the tail, being the substratum (or support).'<sup>3</sup> Those who so envisage (contemplate) this four-footed division [as described above], attain the supreme goal.

Importance of Knowledge

ज्ञानस्य उत्कर्षः

न कर्मणा न प्रजया घनेन त्यागेनैके अमृतत्वमानशुः ॥६॥

6. Not by work (rituals), not by progeny, not by wealth, but by renunciation [alone] some have attained immortality.

How an *avadhūta* moves about in the world (description of his conduct)

अवधूतचर्यानुक्रमणम्

स्वैरं स्वैरविहरणं तत्संसरणम् । साम्बरा वा दिगम्बरा वा । न तेषां धर्माधर्मो न मेध्यामेध्वौ । सदा

सांग्रहण्येष्ट्याश्वमेधमन्तर्यागं यजते । स महामखो महायोगः ॥७॥

7. His (an *avadhūta*'s) unfettered existence (life) in the world consists in his moving about freely (spontaneously, independently), either clad or unclad.<sup>4</sup> For them (the *avadhūtas*), there is nothing righteous or unrighteous; nothing holy or unholy (sacred or profane).<sup>5</sup> Through [a special oblation called] *saṅgrahanyeṣṭi* [which, in the case of an *avadhūta*, consists in his all-encompassing divine wisdom], he performs the inner sacrifice of *aśvamedha* [within his own consciousness]. That is the great sacrifice and the great yoga.<sup>6</sup>



## The great vow

महाव्रतम्

कृत्स्नमेतच्चित्रं कर्म स्वैरं न विगायेत् । तन्महाव्रतम् । न स मूढबल्लिष्यते ॥८॥

8. His strange, wonderful actions are total, complete [fully charged with his own inner realization]. One should not criticize or condemn him for his free and unrestrained behaviour.<sup>7</sup> That is the great vow (*mahāvratā*). He is not tainted [by any of his actions] like the deluded (ignorant) persons.

## Notes and References

1. This mantra is based on the analysis of the *ānandamaya-ātman* in the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* ('Brahmānanda-vallī'). *Priya* is the joy derived from the attainment of the *sādhana-catuṣṭaya*: discrimination between the Real and the unreal, dispassion from worldly objects, self-control, fortitude, faith, meditative awareness, and intense longing for liberation. *Moda* is the delight experienced in deep contemplation, when the mind is absorbed within. *Prāmōda* is the ecstatic joy arising out of the *akhaṇḍā-kāra-vṛtti*, experienced in highly intensified and profound meditation when the *avadhūta*'s mind takes the form of the Indivisible, Infinite Brahman. *Ānanda* is the bliss of *nirvikalpa samādhi*, which is Brahman—Upanishad Brahmayogin's commentary.
2. The cow analogy is continued here and hence the invoking of a cow's tail to draw a parallel to Brahman. The *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, on the other hand, uses the bird imagery.
3. *Brahma-pucchaṁ pratiṣṭhā* is the statement in the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, meaning that Brahman is like the tail in this bird imagery, serving as the support.
4. Upanishad Brahmayogin, in his commentary on this verse, points out that moving about unrestrained does not mean that an *avadhūta*'s conduct would contradict the scripture. He moves about freely, without contradicting the *śruti*, *smṛti* or *śiṣṭācāra* (conduct of wise and disciplined people). The strength of his blazing *jñāna* (spiritual wisdom) does not allow him to go contradictory to the scriptures. Although not preceded by his conscious effort, all his actions are governed and guided by the Divine Will. 'An expert dancer does not take a false step,' as Sri Ramakrishna said.
5. Because he sees only Brahman everywhere.
6. In the *āśvamedha* sacrifice, many *iṣṭis* (offerings of oblations to the fire) have to be performed in order to propitiate the deity Savitr. These offerings are symbolic of universal conquest by the king who performs the sacrifice. In the case of an *avadhūta*, the *saṅgrahanyeṣṭi* is his all-consuming knowledge (*jñāna*), by which he comes to perceive Brahman in everything and realizes that there is nothing else besides Brahman.
7. His apparent lack of self-discipline is because he has transcended the concept of discipline, either self-imposed or society-imposed. Like a pure and innocent child, he moves about carefree and joyous, absorbed in his own Self. All his actions spring from this spontaneous and natural absorption in God-consciousness so that he never falters.

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He who is prepared to renounce all, who amid the strong current of the duality of good and evil, happiness and misery, is calm, steady, balanced, and awake to his Ideal, alone endeavours to attain to Self-knowledge.

—Swami Vivekananda, CW, 7.193

## ❧ Glimpses of Holy Lives ❧

### The Untouchable whom God Loved!

Sri Ramakrishna said that devotees of God formed a caste by themselves. Differences based on caste are not applicable to them. But social conventions die hard even in this 21st century, what to speak of the 7th and 9th centuries, when the following incident occurred!

This devoted sage hailed from an untouchable caste. He would stand at a distance on the banks of River Kaveri and pray to Lord Ranganatha of Srirangam. People like him were then denied entry to the temple. He was known later as *kavisvara* ('lord of poets'), an appellation pertaining to poets of excellence.

There was one Lokasaranga Muni in the temple, who fetched water from the river every day to bathe the iconic form of the deity during worship. One day he found the sage absorbed in the Lord near the place from where he had to fill his pot with water. It was his custom not to speak to anyone while in service of the Lord, which included this occasion. So he threw a small stone on the devotee to attract his attention. The stone struck the sage drawing blood from the wound. Awakened from trance, the sage quickly moved away from the spot. He felt sorry that he had committed a serious offence in standing at that place from where water was fetched for the Lord. After performing his ablutions and bath, Muni filled his vessel with water and proceeded to the temple.

That night Lord Ranganatha appeared to Muni in a dream and reprimanded him for the hurt and insult inflicted on His devotee. He ordered him to carry the devotee on his shoulders into His presence in the shrine. Next morning, Muni respectfully approached the sage and told him of his dream. The sage refused to be carried on his shoulders. Muni told him that since it was the Lord's command there would be no pollution on that count.

On entering the shrine, the sage went into raptures at the Lord's beauty. He beheld the the auspicious form from feet up to crown. He burst into ten hymns in the Lord's praise, describing the beatitude of the revelation. Part of the *Divyaprabandham*, these hymns are known for their adoration and poetic beauty. The tenth verse runs thus:

The cloud-hued cowherd with his mouth full of butter has truly stolen my heart! These eyes of mine, which have beheld Him—the transcendent Lord, my ambrosia, residing now in Srirangam—cannot see anything else!

Those were the sage's last words and he merged into the image of the Lord! The sage was Tiruppāṇ Āzhwār—one of the twelve Āzhwārs. He was also known as Munivāhana ('one who was carried by a Muni'). \*

### Lucre Could Not Lure Him

An ideal and upright householder, Kumbhandas was greatly devoted to God and endowed with detachment and contentment.

He was born in a village called Jamunawat near Govardhan in 1469. His was a big family, with agriculture as the only support. Though in straitened circumstances all his life, Kumbhandas never sought others' help. He held God's grace as supreme.

Kumbhandas was initiated into the *pushti marga* ('religion of grace') by none other than Vallabhacharya, the founder of the tradition, when the latter was on a pilgrimage to Govardhan in 1494. As instructed by his guru, Kumbhandas composed new songs and sang them before the deity, Lord Srinathji, in the temple every day. Vallabhacharya was especially fond of his disciple's compositions glorifying the divine love of Radha and Krishna.

After the death of Vallabhacharya in 1531, Kumbhandas lived under the guidance of Goswami Vitthalnath, who was famous for his commentary on the *pushti marga*. Vitthal-

nath loved Kumbhandas dearly and had great admiration for his life of supreme contentment. By 1546 Kumbhandas became famous for his divine compositions and was counted among the *ashtachap* ('eight die-stamps' producing coins in the shape of poems) poets. Kings considered themselves blessed to have his darshan. Devotees and pundits of Vrindaban craved his holy company. Yet Kumbhandas never allowed his devotion and spiritual life to be tainted by worldly considerations.

Once Vitthalnath wanted to take Kumbhandas on a pilgrimage to Dwarka; it was his idea that if Kumbhandas met some wealthy devotees of the place, his poverty might be alleviated. Although Kumbhandas could not bear even a moment's separation from Lord Srinathji, he obeyed his mentor's request. Scarcely had they left Vrindaban when Kumbhandas was overpowered by a vision of the Lord. In a song full of pathos he gave vent to his pain of separation from his beloved Lord. Deeply touched by Kumbhandas's devotion, Vitthalnath sent him back to his place, to his great relief.

Once, greatly charmed by a Kumbhandas's composition, Akbar sent for him to Fatehpur Sikri. Kumbhandas reluctantly agreed. To Kumbhandas, who considered himself a courtier of Lord Srinathji, the splendour of Akbar's court appeared like dirt. His turban was tattered, his shirt soiled, and he was immersed in sorrow wondering what sin he had committed as a result of which he had been brought to the king's palace. Akbar received him with great honour, but Kumbhandas felt as if he was in hell. How could Akbar's court compare with Vrindaban, where the Lord Himself sported! In a moving song Kumbhandas gave vent to his feelings bemoaning his fate which brought him to this useless place, making him forget God. Akbar had a magnanimous and understanding heart. He had Kumbhandas escorted back to Jamunawat.

In 1564 King Mansingh visited Vrinda-

ban, when he also made a pilgrimage to Govardhan to have darshan of Lord Srinathji. When the king arrived at the temple, Kumbhandas was immersed in singing devotional songs. His singing had a profound effect on Mansingh. Later he went to Jamunawat to meet him. Kumbhandas was at that time deeply absorbed in meditation. When he opened his eyes, he asked his daughter-in-law to bring him his seat and mirror; it was time to wear *tilak* (sacred mark on the forehead). The girl said the horse had 'eaten up the seat and drunk the mirror'! Mansingh understood that the seat was grass and the mirror, a bowl of water! He was greatly pained to see Kumbhandas' abject poverty. He presented him with a golden mirror and a purse of gold coins, but Kumbhandas declined to accept them. Then Mansingh offered to make over the entire village of Jamunawat to Kumbhandas. A horrified Kumbhandas told him that all his hunger was satisfied by wild fruits, and he did not need anything more. The king could do nothing but admire the devotee's renunciation and detachment. He said, 'I've seen many people who are devotees of Maya. But today I've seen a real devotee of God.'

Even in his old age Kumbhandas walked daily from Jamunawat to Govardhan to have Lord Srinathji's darshan. One day in 1582, when he was 113 years old, on his way back to the village from the temple, he stopped to rest by the wayside at a place called Anyore near Shyamkund. He was accompanied by the well-known poet Chaturbhujdas and his young son. Kumbhandas said all of a sudden, 'There is no point in returning home now. I see that my end is near.' Word was sent to Jamunawat, and Vitthalnath arrived. He asked Kumbhandas: 'Now that your end is near, what is your mind occupied with?' In reply Kumbhandas said, 'O Lord, Your divine smile has cast a spell on my mind.' He sang a song which described the divine sport of Radha-Krishna. With the song on his lips Kumbhandas breathed his last. \*

# Culture of Peace

SWAMI KRITARTHANANDA

The phrase 'culture of peace' has a two-fold meaning. One is how to cultivate peace. On several occasions in our lives, peace seems to elude us despite our frantic efforts to retain it. None of us, even for a moment, likes to be in a peaceless, chaotic condition. Yet peace remains a far cry to many. Like the will-o'-the-wisp it appears one moment, only to disappear the next, leaving us in a helpless plight. We must learn the secret of cultivating peace, being in peace.

The second meaning is that peace itself is a culture. A culture is that which an individual or a group of people develop after years of rigorous practice of certain higher values. Those values are then handed down to posterity either through biological lineage or through a teacher-student tradition. This way the cumulative effects of a particular culture lie dormant in every member belonging to it, and in times of crisis guard him like an affectionate mother.

The above two interpretations of the phrase 'culture of peace' may be apparently different. But a little careful study will reveal that they are not two different explanations, but are complementary to each other. The first gradually leads to the next. To be explicit, we first cultivate the habit of being in peace with ourselves, with others, with the surrounding world; then in course of time peace itself becomes a higher value—it becomes transformed to culture.

## The Meaning of Peace

There is none on earth who does not want peace. Everyone would, if possible, get rid of the misery around and have peace. But people have different notions of peace. For example, every war is followed by peace. But that is the peace of the graveyard, which none desires.

That sort of peace is called *tāmasika* (inert type) in Vedanta.

Then there is another kind of peace. Man is a social creature. Social relationships form an important aspect of his life. Instances are not lacking where we compromise truth or the higher ideal of our life, just to please our dominant friends or to meet the exacting demands of the people we love. We cannot say no to their importunate demands in the name of love. And we reason it out saying that we do so just to be at peace with the world. This type of peace can be called *rājasika* (active, passionate type).

And far above all this worldly pettifogging lies a totally different type of peace that transcends worldly relationships. Anyone who crosses the bounds of social obligations and practises spiritual disciplines, reaches this state of peace that is so rare—though not out of reach—in human life. When one attains this state of peace one is said to be a realized soul, 'liberated-in-life' (*jīvanmukta*). Down the ages, innumerable aspirants have attained to this lofty state. We should seek that abiding peace which 'passeth all understanding', in the words of St Paul.<sup>1</sup>

Thus the concept of peace varies from person to person depending upon his outlook on life.

True and lasting reform can only be brought about through peaceful initiatives, not 'diplomatic' ones. When Swami Vivekananda spoke of a 'root and branch reform', he meant a patient, peaceful reform from the grassroot level upwards.

### Why Do We Seek Peace?

A question that naturally follows the above description of peace is: If peace is so difficult to get, why do we seek it at all? Vedanta says it is because our inherent nature is bliss. Peace is its manifestation, and misery its negation. Our real nature, the Atman, is ever blissful. Whenever this natural state of our real Self is suppressed, it cries out for expression from within. Paradoxically, in its journey towards peace and happiness, the soul does get into the clutches of such adverse conditions. The effects of such suppression and the soul's consequent suffering are clearly visible in negative mental phenomena like listlessness, monotony, melancholy, and fear of loneliness. It is like a five-year-old who, when he does not get what he wants, expresses his frustration and anger by crying. It is his way of drawing others' attention and communicating his feelings. So also does the Atman within try to express itself in various ways.

We want peace so that we can overcome misery. Most Hindu prayers, especially those belonging to the Vedic period, conclude with the word *śāntiḥ* uttered three times. What does the repetition signify? Ancient Hindu seers classified misery into three types. The first one, called *ādhiḍaivika duḥkha*, arises from natural calamities like earthquakes, floods and famines. They are nature's angry frown on us, over which we hardly have any control. The second type is known as *ādhibhautika duḥkha*, meaning misery caused by other beings, say wild animals, cruel humans or evil spirits. An overbearing boss, neighbours' jealousy—

We have to be at peace with ourselves first. To achieve that, we must learn to study our own mind and its propensities, and then find out what is really beneficial to us in the march towards our immediate goal in life.

these are some examples of this kind of misery. Then comes the third type, *ādhyātmika duḥkha*, or misery due to physical and mental illnesses. It also includes the misery inflicted by one's own self. Ironical as it may seem, we often impede our growth by our own foolishness and immaturity. So in order to get rid of these three kinds of misery, we repeat the word peace three times. When uttered in all sincerity and earnestness, it enhances peace and harmony, both within and without.

### Peace Has to be Cultivated

It is common experience that when faced with problems man tries to get help from outside, even if that leads to enslavement. Scarcely do we come across people who try to solve their problems by themselves. The vast majority of people labour under the mistaken notion that all their troubles can be settled by worldly means. The *Bhāgavata* throws cold water on this delusion in two significant verses:

*Duḥkheṣvekatārenāpi  
daivaabhūtātmahetuṣu;  
Jivasya na vyavacchedah  
syācettattat pratikriyā.  
Yathā hi puruṣo bhāraṁ  
śirasā gurumudvahan;  
Taṁ skandhena sa ādhatte  
tathā sarvāḥ pratikriyāḥ.*

For living beings there is no permanent relief from the threefold misery of the world; even if there seems to be some solution, it is only temporary—like a man tired of carrying a heavy load on his head for a long time, shifts it from the head to the shoulder (but carry it he must).<sup>2</sup>

From these telling verses it becomes clear that there is no permanent solution to our worldly problems, technically termed *duḥkha*. In youthful pride we imagine that we can influence other people and change our environment. But facts are stranger than fiction. However much we may boast of our brainpower, we find it hard to even change ourselves, let alone changing the world. A boss gets cross with his subordinate and sacks him, only to in-



duct someone else who may be worse. We see our political leaders advancing reform after reform. Each reform itself becomes a problem after a time. This is an apt example of the boomerang effect of their so-called improvement measures. The ills that afflict our world are like chronic rheumatism in the human body. Drive it from one place and you will find it in another making more trouble there. True and lasting reform can only be brought about through peaceful initiatives, not 'diplomatic' ones. When Swami Vivekananda spoke of a 'root and branch reform', he meant a patient, peaceful reform from the grassroot level upwards. This is possible, he said, by imparting true education that gives one self-confidence, that does not sideline other contenders to meet the goals of life. Proceeding in this way man gradually realizes the real meaning of the term '*vasudhaiva kuṭumbakam*'. He will embrace all in his perennial march to the goal of human life. Whoever comes in contact with such a person will feel at ease and at home under all circumstances. These are the real mature ones, and they are truly peaceful. Even though the number of such people is very few, yet they 'are the salt of the earth'<sup>3</sup>—and it is due to them that there is still some peace on earth. Only this spirit of tolerance can direct the cultivation of peace in the world. Needless to say, family culture plays a significant role in the process of spreading peace.

### India, the Land of Peaceful Coexistence

On the face of it, the idea of creating a 'global family' may seem to be just a meaningless intellectual speculation, or at best a utopian dream. Indeed, how are we to get along peacefully with millions of people who differ from one another in almost everything—have different preferences, follow different traditions, believe in different faiths, owe allegiance to different religions? But anybody who has studied India's history will admit that the feat is quite possible—at least in India. So many invasions have swept across our country down the ages. All the invaders found

here a mine of wealth, culture and spirituality, which they themselves lacked. They fell in love with India. In the words of Swami Vivekananda, these foreigners felt a deep fascination for India and her people. It was mostly because Indians, keeping in tune with that great saying, '*vasudhaiva kuṭumbakam*', not only welcomed them but made them their own. When the Israelites were driven out of their own land by the Roman cohorts, they sought shelter in India. Same with the Parsis. In addition to being sheltered, they were fostered and, in time, were absorbed into the mainstream of Indian society. It is not for nothing that Swamiji proclaimed in his maiden speech at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago:

I am proud to belong to a nation which has sheltered the persecuted and the refugees of all religions and all nations of the earth. I am proud to belong to the religion which has sheltered and is still fostering the remnant of the grand Zoroastrian nation.<sup>4</sup>

Recently, the *Bhagavadgītā* was translated into Urdu by Dr Khalifa Abdul Hakeem, a Muslim scholar who is a resident of Lahore, Pakistan. The book is being read with reverence by many Muslims. This is but an echo of what is an age-old practice in India. Centuries ago, Dara Shukoh, a learned son of Shahjahan, translated some Upanishads into Persian, in which language they called it *Oupanikhat*. This book was later translated by a Frenchman into Latin. Schopenhauer, the German philosopher, read this Latin translation. He was so charmed by the ideas that his adoration found expression in the words: 'In the whole world there is no study so beneficial and so elevating as that of the Upanishads. It has been the so-

To live in harmonious relationship with other members of the society, one needs to cultivate not only love and understanding but also a deep feeling for them and a readiness to help out when needed.

lace of my life, it will be the solace of my death.'

### Three Dimensions of Peaceful Living

We were discussing the possibility of peaceful coexistence. It is said that charity begins at home. So too peace; nay, more: we have to be at peace with ourselves first. To achieve that, we must learn to study our own mind and its propensities, and then find out what is really beneficial to us in the march towards our immediate goal in life. In doing so, we will find western psychology of great use, since the subject delves deep into the unconscious part of the human personality. This unconscious needs to be known, educated and trained.

Next comes the question of living in peace with our family. Each individual is a distinct psychological entity in his family. The members of a family are held together only by the bond of love. One thing should be borne in mind, though. Love, in order to be lasting, must be based on a good understanding of one's own capacities and limitations and that of the person loved. The discovery may seem strange, but it is a psychological truth that the more we understand ourselves, the deeper becomes our love for others. We become more tolerant, detached and accommodative of others. All this presupposes a high degree of sacrifice, especially on the part of the older members of the family.

When there is peace within our own family, we can look beyond and think of loving our neighbours. The present-day nuclear family may have its advantages, but speaking from a larger perspective, by focusing too much on the well-being of four or five individ-

uals who comprise the family—too often to an inordinate extent—it actually ignores those outside. 'No man is an island.' We are all parts of the social mainland and have social obligations to fulfil. Our very existence is supported by the society we live in, to which we must repay our dues. Otherwise, as Swami Vivekananda says, 'nature puts a hand on your throat and makes your hands open' (2.5). The idea has been graphically illustrated in the third chapter of the *Bhagavadgītā*, from verses 11 through 16. Society is only a larger representation of the individual. If the individual is found deficient, it is society which suffers in the end, though the fact is seldom recognized. You only get back what you give. Therefore, to live in harmonious relationship with other members of the society, one needs to cultivate not only love and understanding but also a deep feeling for them and a readiness to help out when needed.

Thus we extend the bounds of our love beyond the individual, social and even the national level by becoming more and more friendly and accommodative. It is this particular trait that foreigners seem to admire most in Indians.

But our day-to-day life does not always corroborate this. These days there are many successful managers well trained in business management, personnel management and whatnot. We see that even they fail to make others their own. Why? Because in dealing with others, it will not do to have 'fair faces and false hearts ... howling righteousness on the surface and utter hollowness beneath'—phrases from an inspiring letter of Swami Vivekananda's (5.73). The man who would lead others has to first become spiritual himself, because it is only spirit that can influence spirit. But how does spirituality bring about lasting peace and harmony in the world? Spirituality helps us recognize the immanent God in all beings. It is only when all our duties and dealings are subordinated to God that we gain a clearer outlook and some insight into the workings of the Cosmic Mind,

Behind all our dealings with people one idea needs to reign supreme: that they are divine.

Man can—and does—make mistakes; still he is divine. This idea can never afford to be lost sight of.

which is really controlling our world. We then become humble.

Behind all our dealings with people one idea needs to reign supreme: that they are divine. Man can—and does—make mistakes; still he is divine. This idea can never afford to be lost sight of. When friendships fail and relationships break, still we are all God, human manifestations of Divinity on earth. In Swami Vivekananda's matchless depiction:

Not two or many, 'tis but one,  
And thus in me all me's I have;  
I cannot hate, I cannot shun  
Myself from me, I can but love. (8.164)

## Conclusion

In the foregoing paragraphs the word spirituality occurred several times. When we are spiritual, we radiate peace and harmony, love and understanding. So spirituality is the prime requisite. But isn't it difficult to be spiritual? The answer is an emphatic no. Spirituality is our birthright. Each one of us is divine, despite our apparent deficiencies. Our only task is to assert this inherent divinity always and under all circumstances. We can bring about lasting peace if we unearth and bring to light this hidden spiritual treasure which now lies buried under the debris of our false personality. And in that task, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi's life and teachings are a great inspiration to us. Just before her *mahāsamādhi*, in

We first cultivate the habit of being in peace with ourselves, with others, with the surrounding world; then in course of time peace itself becomes a higher value—it becomes transformed to culture.

what has now come to be regarded as her parting message, she gave an invaluable piece of advice to one of her women disciples:

Let me tell you something. My child, if you want peace, then do not look into anybody's faults. Look into your own faults. Learn to make the whole world your own. No one is a stranger; the world is your own.<sup>5</sup>

After this great teaching, all remarks seem superfluous.

Let us pray wholeheartedly to the Divine Mother, who resides in all beings as the embodiment of peace, to shower Her infinite grace on us all:

*Yā devī sarvabhūteṣu  
śāntirūpeṇa saṁsthitā;  
Namastasyai namastasyai  
namastasyai namo namaḥ.*<sup>6</sup>

\*

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## The Grammar of Right Living

Get your grammar right! Live in the *active voice* rather than in the *passive*, thinking more about what you do than what happens to you. Live in the *indicative mood* rather than in the *subjunctive*, concerned with things as they are rather than as they might be. Live in the *present*, without regret for the *past* or worry about the *future*. Live in the *first person*, criticizing yourself rather than finding fault with others. Live in the *singular number*, caring more for the approval of your own conscience than for the applause of the crowd. If you want a *verb to conjugate*, you can't do better than use 'love'.

# Principles of Jainism and Practical Vedanta

SWAMI BRAHMESHANANDA

Jainism is one of the major ancient religions of the world. Scholars believe that it originated as a reaction to the cumbersome ritualism (*karma kāṇḍa*) and as a revolt against animal sacrifices in the name of religion, which were prevalent in Hinduism. We get evidence of this protest against killing animals in sacrifices (*yajñas*) in the mythological stories of Jainism. Other Jainologists, however, consider Jainism as old as Hinduism, if not older. It was prevalent then as one of the popular religions. These scholars believe that in India, from times immemorial, there were two parallel streams of culture: the Vedic or brahman culture, and the shramana or Magadhana culture. The former originated and flourished in the Indus valley or Sarasvati Valley according to modern scholars, and the latter had its birth and growth in Magadha, the present state of Bihar, India. There are certain fundamental differences between these two cultures, which have persisted in some form or other till today.

## Some Basic Differences

The Vedic culture emphasizes the concept of a brahmana or brahmanahood, whereas the shramana culture has its basis in the concept of an all-renouncing monk, a bhikkhu or shramana. The Vedic culture sets before us the concept of a *jīvanmukta*, a person liberated in life. A *jīvanmukta* can even be a householder. He is also called a rishi (*mantra-draṣṭā*), a person who has realized the scriptural truths. There are many references to such householder rishis in the Hindu scriptures. King Janaka and the sages

Yājñavalkya, Vasiṣṭha, Atri and many other rishis were all householders.

Shramana culture, on the other hand, considers formal sannyasa or total renunciation of all possessions, desires and even activities essential for attaining liberation. The word arhat refers to a person who has gained perfect control over all his activities. An arhat, without any activity, is projected as the ideal. Of the four *puruṣārthas*, or goals of life, the brahmana culture stresses dharma or righteous conduct, whereas the shramana culture emphasizes moksha or freedom more than dharma. One must keep in mind these few basic facts while trying to undertake a comparative study of Vedanta and Jainism. It must also be borne in mind that Brahmanism or Hinduism is not the same as Vedanta. Likewise Shramanism and Jainism are not identical. Besides, both Vedanta and Jainism have various aspects: philosophical, ethical, social and practical. There are some similarities between the two as well as some dissimilarities. One must be careful not to draw simplistic conclusions.

Etymologically, Vedanta means the end or the conclusion of the Vedas. Thus the last portions of the Vedas—the Upanishads and

Although Jainism adores *tirthankaras*, or prophets, it also believes that anyone can attain to that exalted state by one's own self-effort.

Adoration of the *tirthankaras* is more a reminder of the state of perfection than worship.

the principles or philosophy propounded in them—are called Vedanta. In fact, Vedanta is a system of philosophy which forms the basis of Hinduism. There are different interpretations of the Upanishads based on which there are various schools of Vedanta like Dvaita, Viśiṣṭādvaita and Advaita. Generally, the Advaita philosophy as pro-

pounded by Śaṅkarācārya is equated with Vedanta.

### Principles of Jainism and Vedanta

Now, if we believe that only the ritualistic aspect of Hinduism and Brahmanism is repugnant to Jainism, there should not be any antagonism between Jainism and the spiritual aspect of the Upanishads. Even the Upanishads have decried Vedic ritualism characterized by excessive activity and sacrificial paraphernalia, and have preached the conscious principle, the Atman, the realization of which they advocated as the ultimate goal of life. There cannot be any contradiction between Jainism and Vedanta on this score.

Both Jainism and Vedanta accept the Atman as the real nature of all living beings—a reality that is different from the body, the *prāṇas*, the mind and the intellect, which are inert (*jaḍa*). Jainism calls them *pudgala*. Vedanta propounds that the individual soul forgets its real nature and identifies with the unreal (body and mind) due to ignorance (*avidyā*). Jainism also considers *mithyātva* or wrong knowledge—ignorance—as the chief cause of bondage between the conscious principle, Atman, and the insentient *pudgala*. It, however, postulates a few more causes of bondage: the absence of dispassion for sense enjoyment (*avirati*), carelessness (*pramāda*), attachment (*kaṣāya*) and the activities of body, mind and speech (*yoga*).

Both Vedanta and Jainism believe in the theory of karma and transmigration. In Jainism the philosophy of karma is discussed in great detail. To get rid of the bondage caused by past karma, Jainism recommends two means: *saṁvara* and *nirjara*. *Saṁvara* means prevention of new karmic bondages—

prevention of the influx of fresh karma. *Nirjara* deals with the methods by which the already formed bondages could be severed—the purgation of karma. This is done by Right Faith, Right Knowledge and Right Conduct. These three together are called *tri-ratna* ('triple jewels') and are the very basis of Jainism. Besides these, *tapas* (austerity) is so greatly stressed in Jainism that it may be considered the fourth jewel.

When we try to study these basic principles in the light of Swami Vivekananda's Practical Vedanta, we find certain similarities. Swamiji too greatly emphasized faith as one of the most important virtues. While in Jainism Right Faith means having faith in the true and pure guru (*śuddha guru*), pure deity or prophet (*śuddha deva*) and true and pure religion

(*śuddha dharma*), Swamiji stressed faith in oneself. He went to the extent of proclaiming:

The old religions said that he was an atheist who did not believe in God. The new religion says that he is the atheist who does not believe in himself.

It is not that Jainism does not preach faith in oneself. In fact, Jainism does not believe in a God who creates, sustains and destroys the universe. Likewise, it does not advocate the concept of grace of a superhuman divine being. Although Jainism adores *tirthaṅkaras*, or prophets, it also believes that anyone can attain to that exalted state by one's own self-effort. Adoration of the *tirthaṅkaras* is more a reminder of the state of perfection than worship. This does not contradict Swamiji's Practical Vedanta, which preaches the potential divinity in every human being. Swamiji repeatedly exhorted his disciples to become rishis—even greater than himself.

Jainism lays the greatest stress on the necessity of character and purity of conduct

According to Advaita Vedanta, the individual soul and the Cosmic Soul or Brahman are essentially one and non-different. But Jainism believes that individual souls are innumerable and separate, and that this differentiation remains even after emancipation.



(*samyak caritra*). So does Swamiji:

Money does not pay, nor name; fame does not pay, nor learning. It is love that pays; it is character that cleaves through the adamant walls of difficulties. (4.367)

In fact, character building was the very basis of all his practical plans of action. He defined education as the 'man-making, character-making assimilation of ideas'. (3.302)

Observance of the five *yamas*—truth, non-violence, non-stealing, chastity and non-possessiveness—wholly or partially as vows is the basis of Right Conduct. According to the great sage Patañjali, the author of the *Yoga Sūtras*, these five values must be practised by everyone, everywhere and at all times, without exception. Sri Ramakrishna was fully established in these virtues. Swami Vivekananda too advocated them. Hence there can be no dispute in this matter. The only difference is that whereas in Jainism the greatest stress is laid on ahimsa, or non-injury, Swamiji has emphasized truth and chastity.

Right Knowledge is greatly emphasized in Vedanta because ignorance can be destroyed only by knowledge. The chief means of acquiring this knowledge is called jnana yoga, which aims at attaining the highest spiritual knowledge. However, there is an important difference between Vedanta and Jainism. According to Advaita Vedanta, the individual soul and the Cosmic Soul or Brahman are essentially one and non-different. But Jainism believes that individual souls are innumerable and separate, and that this differentiation remains even after emancipation. But one thing is certain: both Jainism and Vedanta believe that the soul in its real nature is pure, free, blissful and of the nature of consciousness.

Jainism is basically a religion which

strongly emphasizes renunciation and meditation and the giving up of all activity. It is a renunciation-dominant religion (*nivṛtti-pradhāna dharma*). In Jain temples we often find images of Jain prophets and saints sitting—or even standing—in meditation. Swami Vivekananda too assigned the prime place for concentration of mind and meditation in his scheme of Practical Vedanta. He was himself an adept in meditation, and considered concentration of mind to be the secret of success in all spheres of life. In Jainism several meditation techniques are described, starting from such simple and preliminary techniques of collecting the dispersed mind as *anānupūrvī*, to the most advanced *śukla-dhyāna*.

*Anekāntavāda* and *syādvāda* are two inter-related theories which demonstrate the catholicity of Jainism. An object or phenomenon can be viewed from various viewpoints, and these various views can all be true, though only partially.

*Anekantavada* and *syadvada* are two interrelated theories which demonstrate the catholicity of Jainism. An object or phenomenon can be viewed from various viewpoints, and these various views can all be true, though only partially.

object or phenomenon can be viewed from various viewpoints, and these various views can all be true, though only partially. To explain this, Jains give the famous example of several blind men feeling various parts of an elephant

and deriving their own conclusions about it, which are all only partially true. This principle resembles Sri Ramakrishna's saying: 'As many faiths, so many paths.' God can have various forms according to the conceptions of different devotees, and at the same time can be formless too. And there could be various paths to reach Him, all of which can be equally valid.

### Practical Vedanta in the Light of Jainism

We have thus far seen some basic tenets of Jainism in the light of Practical Vedanta. Let us now try to evaluate some of the principles of Practical Vedanta as preached by Swami Vivekananda in the light of Jainism. Let us, to begin with, take up Swami Vivekananda's

definition of religion:

Each soul is potentially divine.

The goal is to manifest this divinity within by controlling nature, external and internal.

Do this either by work, or worship, or psychic control, or philosophy—by one, or more, or all of these—and be free.

This is whole of religion. Doctrines, or dogmas, or rituals, or books, or temples, or forms, are but secondary details. (1.124)

Does Jainism accept this definition? Let us see. We have already seen that Jainism believes the soul to be a conscious entity and considers its freedom from karmic bondage the goal of life. We have also seen that in Jainism greater stress is laid on raja yoga. However, devotion, worship or bhakti is not neglected. Worship of images in temples and chanting of hymns and praises form an integral part of Jain religious practice. Jain devotees derive immense spiritual benefit from such observances. Nor are philosophical studies neglected. There is enough scope for scholarship and the exercise of reason in

Jainism and there is a vast mass of Jain philosophical texts. However, the path of action, or karma yoga, has not been extolled in Jainism as it has been done in the *Bhagavadgītā*. 'Service to man is service to God' is the very basis of Swami Vivekananda's Practical Vedanta. In Jainism service is considered one of the six kinds of internal *tapas*, or austerity. But here too service only means service of saints and monastics. Although charity is considered meritorious for householders, according to Jainism all activities ultimately lead to greater bondage. Hence karma is not considered a means of purification. Instead, *tapas* is advocated as a means of cleansing oneself of karmic impurity.

Swami Vivekananda considers external

details like rituals, forms and temples of secondary importance. Jainism also emphasizes mental attitude more than the external act. This subject is discussed in Jainism under the subject of *naya*, meaning outlook. If a meritorious act is performed with an evil intention, it cannot be considered meritorious. This is akin to the karma yoga of Vedanta, according to which the fruits of an action performed without attachment cannot affect the doer. There are two types of violence according to Jainism: actual violence and mental or intentional violence—*dravya hiṃsā* and *bhāva hiṃsā*. Of the two, intentional violence is considered worse than actual violence.

Self-enquiry is greatly emphasized in Vedanta, where it is called *tvam-pada-śodhana*. When one asks the questions 'Who am I?',

'What is my real nature?' and seeks answers to such questions, one ultimately realizes one's real, pure, conscious nature—the Atman, free from adjuncts like body, mind, ego and intellect. There is no difference between Vedanta and Jainism as

'Whom you want to kill is none but you; whom you want to bind is none other than you. To kill anyone is to kill oneself; compassion towards creatures is compassion towards oneself.'

—Lord Mahavira

far as the process of inquiry is concerned.

Swami Vivekananda based his scheme of Practical Vedanta on the foundation of Advaita Vedanta. We must serve others because in serving them we really serve ourselves; because there are no two beings, there is only one Cosmic Soul. Your soul and others' soul are the same. To harm others is only to harm oneself. The Jain prophet Mahāvira, speaks in almost the same vein: 'Whom you want to kill is none but you; whom you want to bind is none other than you. To kill anyone is to kill oneself; compassion towards creatures is compassion towards oneself.' In this teaching of Lord Mahāvira we find an echo of Advaita Vedanta.

## Conclusion

Vedanta is as old as the Vedas and is the basis of the various Indian philosophical systems. Although Vedanta had always been a practical scheme of life as well, for modern times Swami Vivekananda has given it a new interpretation called 'Practical Vedanta'. From the above analysis, it will also be evident that although Jainism may differ philosophically and empirically from traditional Hinduism, there are more similarities than differences between Jainism and Vedanta, especially Swamiji's Practical Vedanta. Besides, Swamiji's definition of Vedanta is very wide, all-comprehensive and all-inclusive. According to it, Religion is Vedanta, which includes all the different religions like Jainism, Buddhism and Hinduism. Even if one may not accept this definition of Vedanta, one would find a lot of similarities between Jainism and Vedanta. Not only this, the two systems can help and enrich each other—as it should be. Vedanta can gain something from Jainism and Jainism too can benefit from Vedanta, without in any way compromising their special features or originality.

For example, the practice of 'serving man as God' (*śiva jñāne jīva sevā*) can easily become a part of the Jain way of life, since it accepts every soul as a pure, free, conscious entity. It is gratifying to note that a number of Jain organizations have nowadays undertaken philan-

No true religion preaches hatred, separation or conflict. It brings people together and spreads goodwill. This has been the aim of both Jainism and Vedanta, which is why both Jainism and Vedanta have flourished in India.

all religions. None can begrudge the acceptance of such a liberal, non-sectarian mantra as a part of their religious practice.

Jains seek forgiveness from all creatures of the world chanting the following verse: 'I forgive all creatures, may all creatures forgive me. I have friendship with everyone, and enmity towards none.'

No true religion preaches hatred, separation or conflict. It brings people together and spreads goodwill. This has been the aim of both Jainism and Vedanta, which is why both Jainism and Vedanta have flourished in India. There has always been a cordial relationship between the Jains and the Vedantins and it continues to grow stronger every day. \*

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## Everybody, Somebody, Anybody, Nobody

There was an important job to be done and Everybody was sure that Somebody would do it. Anybody would have done it but Nobody did it. Somebody got angry about it because it was Everybody's job. Everybody thought that Anybody could do it but Nobody realized that Nobody would do it. It ended up that Everybody blamed Somebody when Nobody did what Anybody could have done!



# Reviews



For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA  
publishers need to send two copies of their latest publications.

**The Sacred Book of Four Thousand: Nalayira Divya Prabandham.** Trans. Srirama Bharati. Sri Sadagopan Tirunaraswami Divya Prabandha Pathasala, Jaladam-pet, Chennai 601302. 2000. 792 pp. Price not mentioned.

Once Ramanuja was begging alms at Srirangam when he came to the house of Periyambai, his guru. At that time he was singing a verse from Andal's *Tiruppavai* in which Andal and her friends call upon Nappinnai (Sri Krishna's *gopi* wife in the Tamil tradition) to open the door of her house and let them in. Just then Attulai, Periyambai's daughter, opened the door. So absorbed was Ramanuja in the song that he immediately bowed down to her, taking her to be Nappinnai. Attulai was startled at his strange behaviour and hurried inside to call her father. Periyambai then came out and found Ramanuja in ecstasy, singing *Tiruppavai*, and at once understood the reason for his behaviour.

According to R Parthasarathy (in *Ramanujacharya*, p. 57), 'He [Ramanuja] was seen always reciting to himself the beautiful lines from the Tamil *Prabandha*, whose devotion and faith spoke the language of the heart.' It is even said that Embar, Ramanuja's cousin and disciple, could understand what verse of the Alvar songs Ramanuja was thinking of from his behaviour. Why were these songs so important that even a renowned philosopher like Ramanuja would meditate on them throughout the day?

Several centuries before Ramanuja a group of saints appeared in southern India who completely changed the religious life of India. Like the rishis of ancient times, whose deep spiritual realizations recorded in the Vedas became the foundation of most of Indian philosophy, the Tamil Vaishnava and Saiva saints also revealed their spiritual experiences in their songs and thus inspired a new path towards God—one of ecstatic love. The twelve Tamil Vaishnava saints were called Alvars ('those who are immersed in God'), and were possibly the first to establish an intimate human relationship with God and realize Him through intense longing. Their love was for Vishnu in all His aspects. He who was the Lord of Vaikuntha was also the Lord in the

temple. It was He who took the form of a man-lion to rescue Prahlada, it was He who as a baby was tied up by Yasoda for stealing butter, and again it was He who dwelt in their own heart. The songs of the Alvars were eventually compiled in a volume called the *Nalayira Divya Prabandham*, but as they were in Tamil, they did not spread much outside southern India. Yet the silent influence of the Alvars' teachings eventually reverberated throughout the country.

Besides singing these songs himself, Ramanuja arranged that they be regularly sung in the Vishnu temples in southern India. He also insisted that all his disciples study them and that commentaries be written on them. According to Friedhelm Hardy (in *Viraha-Bhakti*, p. 244), 'the five oldest commentaries alone' on Nammalvar's *Tiruvaymoli* 'add up to the size of the *Mahabharata*'. And these commentaries themselves are highly valued for their teachings and devotional fervour. That this tradition has remained somewhat misunderstood has been due solely to the lack of translations. Only in recent years have Nammalvar's *Tiruvaymoli* and Andal's *Tiruppavai* and *Nacchiyar Tirumoli*, plus a few excerpts from other Alvar songs, been translated into English.

Finally, however, due to the devoted efforts of Srirama Bharati, director of Sri Sadagopan Tirunaraswami Divya Prabandha Pathasala and a renowned performer of Alvar songs, the complete *Nalayira Divya Prabandham* of more than four thousand verses has been translated into English. Taking the help of the commentaries of the revered *acharyas* of the tradition, Srirama Bharati has rendered the songs into meaningful yet elegant verses. For anyone who loves God, or who earnestly yearns to know how to love God, these songs are a feast. A few examples of these beautiful translations are given here.

The first of the Alvar songs is Perialvar's *Tiruppallandu*, in which the Alvar himself blesses the Lord to live forever, and prays that the bond between them is never broken. Perialvar's favourite theme is Krishna as a baby, and practically every aspect of a village child's life is covered in his songs. This is why the Alvar has the privilege of blessing the Lord. But some of his other songs also, such as the following, reveal his extraordinary familiarity

with the Lord: 'Caught you! Now I will never let you go. Lest you disappear through your magical powers, I swear upon the Lady of the Lotus! You were never true to anyone. O Lord of Tirumal-irumsolai abounding in springs in which people from town and village come to bathe and worship to rid themselves of their karmas, O my Master!' (pp. 88-9)

Andal is the only woman among the Alvars, and she is said to have been found by Perialvar as a baby in his tulsi grove. Having been brought up by a saint, she knew nothing but God. Her whole life was centred around the Lord, and she would marry no one else—a seemingly impossible feat. But Andal's intense longing could make the impossible possible. In one of her songs she pleads to her friends: 'No use fighting shy, now all the folks have come to know. If at all you wish to do me good—I swear—if at all you want to see me alive, take me now to Ayppadi. If I see the beautiful bachelor [Vamana] who took the earth, I may live.' (pp. 122-3)

Kulasekhara was a king, but he cared little for ruling a kingdom. He was mad for the Lord: 'To the world I am mad! To me the world is mad. Alas! What use dilating on this. "O Cowherd-lord!", I call, mad with love for the Lord of Arangam [Srirangam], My master.' (pp. 135)

Through the Lord's grace, Tiruppan, an untouchable, was brought inside the temple at Srirangam. It is said that his only recorded song was sung before he merged into the Lord. In the last verse he says: 'The dark-hued Lord is the Lord who came as a cowherd-lad and stole butter. He is the Lord of Gods, and the Lord of Arangam also. He has stolen my heart. After seeing my Lord of ambrosial delight, my eyes will see naught else.' (p. 188)

To the Alvars, the Lord was their Master, their Child, their Friend, and their Beloved. In some of their songs Tirumangai and Nammalvar assume the attitude of a girl yearning for her Beloved Lord. Here Tirumangai sends bumble-bees as messengers to the Lord: 'Hovering on the lotus-blooms—never leaving your beloved spouse, drinking from the nectar filled buds, O my freckled bumble-bees! Go to my bow-wielding Lord, tell Him of my condition. He resides in Tiruvali guarding the Vedic fire.' (p. 249)

Again, the Alvars often express their amazement at the contradictions in the Lord, as in this song of Pey: 'Can the world understand this wonder? The Lord who reclines in the ocean-deep came as a wonder child and killed an ogress. He conducted the great Bharata war and destroyed mighty kings. And yet He cringed in fear when His mother threatened Him with a churning rod for stealing butter!' (p. 656)

It has been thought in the West that, in formulating the Visishtadvaita philosophy, Ramanuja was not influenced by the Alvars. However, one need only glance at Nammalvar's *Tiruvaymoli* to understand that this is not the case. Deceptively simple and extraordinarily beautiful, Nammalvar's verses are at the same time quite profound: 'Becoming me He became the worlds and the souls and filled them, then Himself too became this me and praised Himself. Sweet as honey, milk and sugarcane sap, my Lord of Malirumsolai—He became all these after devouring my soul.' (p. 611)

We are greatly indebted to the translator, Srirama Bharati (who passed away very recently), for unlocking the door of the Alvar world for non-Tamil speakers. With the publication of this work a big gap—both for researchers and lovers of God—has been filled in. For those who know Tamil, the original text has also been included. The few verses quoted here really cannot do justice to what is in this volume. To devotees of God we can only say: Get this book, read it, and be blessed.

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**The Meaning of 'Macbeth'.** Ed. Bhupendranath Seal. SaS Publications, 11-A Ram Banerjee Lane, Kolkata 700012. 1999. 12+94 pp. Rs 50.

*The Meaning of 'Macbeth'* edited by Bhupendranath Seal with a Foreword by Prof Visvanath Chatterjee, is indeed a very cheering document of the high quality of Shakespearean learning in our country. The work contains eight ably written essays on different aspects of *Macbeth* and I am deeply impressed by their perceptiveness as no less by their lucid style.

The opening essay is by Prof Sushil Chunder Dutt, who was my teacher some seventy years ago. I used to be fascinated by his beautiful English and it is for the first time that I have before me an essay from his pen.

Prof Visvanath Chatterjee's essay, 'Lady Macbeth: Fascinating Tragic Heroine', shows that in criticism the head is as important as the heart. About Lady Macbeth, Prof Chatterjee says: 'Never before was the picture of a broken and contrite heart so vividly and poignantly portrayed.' Prof Chatterjee's analysis sustains a very fine sensibility. His other essay in the volume, 'All Cover, All Lose: The Meaning of *Macbeth*', is indeed a very sensitive response to the tragedy.

Prof Vikram Chopra has now an international reputation as a Shakespeare scholar, and his essay



'Lady Macbeth's Motherhood' shows how he deserves this reputation. Sumita Banerjee's 'The Supernatural in *Macbeth*' is indeed an outstanding contribution to our understanding of the subject.

Dr Bhupendranath Seal's essay 'The Hand Image in *Macbeth*', draws out attention to a side of the drama which many of us missed so far. I have read Dr Apurba Sannal's 'Dramatic Irony in *Macbeth*' with admiration for his learning and his very sensitive approach to the play. Prof Sita Chatterjee's 'The Porter in *Macbeth*' is a new approach to an old theme.

The inclusion of excerpts from an essay by G K Chesterton, which is now almost forgotten, has greatly added to the value of the publication. In the second Appendix, we have a very fine treatment of the imagery in *Macbeth*.

At the end, let me confess that this little book has given me an idea of Shakespeare scholarship from which I have been cut off for long years. I have no doubt the book gives a new dimension and a new depth to our understanding of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.

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**Śrīmad Bhagavadgītā: Śrī Vasiṣṭha's Version.** Trans. K N Subramaniam. Samata Books, 10 Kamaraj Bhavan, 573 Anna Salai, Chennai 600006. 1999. 80 pp. Rs 50.

*Śrīmad Bhagavadgītā* is the epitome of all the scriptures of the world. Its style is so simple and elegant that, just after a little study, one can easily follow the word structure. But the thoughts behind these words are so deep and abstruse that even a lifelong, constant study does not show one the end of it. Really speaking, as many feel, no sacrifice, charity, austerity, pilgrimage, religious vows, self-restraint or fasting stand in comparison with the study of the *Bhagavadgītā*.

The book under review is something special. The *Yogavāsiṣṭha* is a magnificent work on Vedānta philosophy containing nearly 28,000 verses. Its poetic excellence and depth, and the grandeur of its exposition of the Vedānta have earned for the work a very high place in spiritual literature. The great sage Vālmiki is said to be its author. The spiritual instructions of Sri Krishna to Arjuna in a future age are imparted earlier to Sri Rama by the sage Vasiṣṭha. Vasiṣṭha's version of the *Bhagavadgītā* expounds only the Vedāntic ideals, beginning with Sāṅkara as advocating knowledge as the ultimate means to liberation. Unlike any other preceptor in

the whole world, Vasiṣṭha finds it necessary to assure the seeker that Self-realization is attainable through one's own effort and neither fate nor any other factor can thwart one's efforts.

Sri K N Subramaniam, an erudite scholar, has done a great job by translating Vasiṣṭha's *Bhagavadgītā* into English, thereby giving us an opportunity to enlighten ourselves with the divine music of *satyam*, *śivam* and *advaitam*. While going through the text, we encounter certain principles unique to our religious scriptures. When a person is tossed between *daiva* and *pauruṣa*, it is the latter that is capable of achieving everything. *Pauruṣa* is proper self-effort. The three means through which worldly, religious and spiritual aims are attained are one's effort, scriptural knowledge and guru's guidance. The person who has acquainted himself with the basic approach of the scriptures should enquire: 'Who am I? Who is experiencing *samsara*?' In reply to these questions, Vasiṣṭha says that *santoṣa*, *sādhu-saṅga*, *vicāra* and *śama* are the means that can rescue a person from the ocean of *samsara*. He also points out beautifully that the mansion of *moksha* has these four virtues as gatekeepers. One should acquire the friendship and support of all the four. The triple disciplines that have to be pursued for the attainment of *moksha* are the knowledge of the Truth (*tattvajñāna*), extinction of the mind (*manonāśa*) and eradication of desires (*vāsanākṣaya*). When an aspirant devotes himself exclusively to the practice of the aforesaid spiritual disciplines, he attains *moksha*, or becomes liberated. Sage Vasiṣṭha himself attaches the highest importance to his teachings. He teaches what he has fully and clearly experienced. To him, knowledge is the summum bonum. Only through knowledge is liberation attained.

But if we go by the bare text, it will be difficult to establish that *jñāna yoga* or the path of knowledge is the central teaching of the *Bhagavadgītā*. Rather, we get the impression that the teachings of *jñāna yoga* are not complete without *karma* and *bhakti*. Indeed, Vasiṣṭha is a super-seer, who always comprehends the past, present and future.

Sri Subramaniam seems to say that there is greater transcendental flavour in the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* version of the *Bhagavadgītā* than in the *Mahābhārata* version. In the former, the Reality addresses the soul, and in the latter, the Supreme Lord addresses the devotee. The present edition has been neatly compiled. One can expect its wide circulation among spiritual aspirants all over the world.

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## ❧ Reports ❧

**Celebrated.** The golden jubilee of Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandir, Katihar, from 20 to 22 December 2001. Srimat Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj, Vice-President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated the celebrations and presided over the public meeting held on the occasion. Sri Sri Narayan Yadav, Minister for Urban Development, and Sri Ram Prakash Mahto, Minister for Education, Government of Bihar, were chief guest and guest of honour, respectively. Sri Yadav released a souvenir commemorating the golden jubilee of the school.

**Organized.** A colourful procession and a public meeting, by Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Ranchi, on 2 February, in connection with its platinum jubilee celebrations. Swami Smarananandaji, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, presided over the meeting and inaugurated the video conference facility at the Ashrama on the same day.

**Visited.** Dr Dinesh Shadangi, Jharkhand health minister; Ramakrishna Mission TB Sanatorium, Ranchi, on 4 February. He addressed a public meeting held on the occasion.

**Commissioned.** A new computer unit at Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Sargachhi, by Sri Sankar Roychowdhury, Member of the Rajya Sabha and former Chief of the Army Staff, on 6 February.

**Conducted.** An international seminar on 'Philosophy and Science: An Exploratory Approach to Consciousness', by the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata, on 8 and 9 February. Srimat Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj inaugurated the seminar and gave a short benedictory address. Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj spoke at the inaugural session and declared open an exhibition on 'Consciousness' organized on the occasion. In all 17 eminent scholars from all over the world participated in the seminar.

**Inaugurated.** Vivekananda Vidya Mandir, a school built by Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Smriti Mandir, Porbandar, as part of its earthquake rehabilitation programme; by Bharat Ratna Dr A P J Abdul Kalam, on 13 February. Dr Kalam also addressed a 3000-



strong youth convention organized by the centre, and meditated in the Smriti Mandir room where Swami Vivekananda had stayed in 1891-2.

**Dedicated.** The newly built Sri Ramakrishna temple at Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Habiganj, Bangladesh, by Srimat Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj, on 14 February. The 3-day celebration from 13 to 15 February held in connection with the temple dedication ceremony and the 80th anniversary of the Ashrama, was attended by a large number of devotees. Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj opened a new hostel building and a hall at the centre on the 13th.

**Organized.** The concluding function of its centenary celebrations, by Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Varanasi, from 14 to 17 February. Srimat Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj, President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated the new Centenary Memorial building for the hospital's out-patient department on the 14th. The public meetings were addressed by Most Revered President Maharaj, Srimat Swami Gahananandaji Maharaj, Vice-President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, and others. Thousands of devotees attended the 4-day programme.